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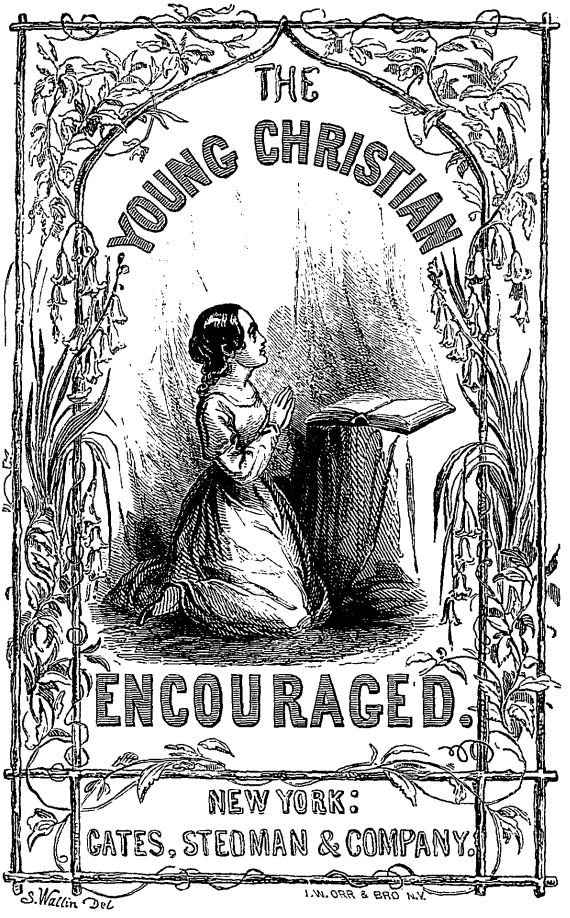
THE
YOUNG CHRISTIAN
ENCOURAGED.
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THE

YOUNG CHRISTIAN

ENCOURAGED;

OR,

THE PASTOR'S DAUGHTER

AT SCHOOL.

BY

LOUISA PAYSON HOPKINS,
Author of "The Pastor's Daughter," "Henry Langdon," &c.

THIRD EDITION.

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PREFACE.

THE readers of the "PASTOR'S DAUGHTER" will recollect that it was founded, in part, on conversations which had actually occurred between Maria and her father. The title of the present work might naturally lead to the supposition, that it is the transcript of a real correspondence between the same parties. Such, however, was not the case. Nevertheless, it is hoped that a portion of the same favour, which was so liberally extended to the former work, may be awarded to this, and on grounds nearly the same. For though no *correspondence* ever took place between Maria and her father—no separation having occurred to give occasion for it—yet it will readily be admitted that the mere *form* of the work is of little importance; and that, whether that of Letters or Conversations be adopted, is a question of mere convenience. As to the *con-*

tents of the book; an acquaintance with the sentiments, feelings, and language of another, so intimate as that which is gained from a series of daily conversations carried on for years, may authorize the hope, that an attempt to write, as he would have written, will not be altogether unsuccessful. It was supposed also, that by assuming real characters, as the parties in the correspondence, a stamp of individuality would be impressed on it, not to be gained in any other way.

The book is, perhaps, liable to another objection. It may be said that the "young Christian," to whom the letters are addressed, seems to have made little or no progress in the course of the correspondence; and that the same doubts, difficulties, and temptations which obstructed the way at its commencement, seem to have been felt to its close. It would not be a sufficient answer to this objection to say, that the writer's own experience did not allow any other representation; since the question might well be asked, "Why, then, write at all? Why not leave the task for some one who has made nearer approaches to perfection, instead of publishing a useless

book ?" And to these questions no answer can be returned, if the feature alluded to does indeed destroy the usefulness of the work. But it has been written on the supposition that this is not the case; and that the class of Christians for whose aid and encouragment the letters are designed, will be more benefited by a faithful transcript of their own experience, with advice suited to their own condition, than by a delineation of a more advanced stage of Christian experience. Moreover, the Christian life, like the ordinary life of man, is one of involution, so to speak: it is like a line which returns upon itself, apparent retrogression not being inconsistent with real progress. If this is true, as is believed, of every stage of the Christian life, much more is it true that the means of advancement are the same for all;—the same for the strong man as for the babe in grace; for the "fathers," as for the "young men," in Christ Jesus; for him who has "fought a good fight," and is well nigh "ready to be offered," as for him who has just girded on his armour for the battle. To each and all of these it must be said, "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

Nevertheless, this little book is designed, as has already been remarked, for the "babes in Christ;" for those who, with faltering and interrupted steps, are marching heavenward. To such may it prove a helper!

L. P. H.

THE

YOUNG CHRISTIAN

ENCOURAGED.

LETTER I.

MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

As I look at you, just entering upon your Christian course, and consider how many dangers and perplexities await you, I feel as a mariner, returned from a long and dangerous voyage might be supposed to do, in reference to a child about to set out on the same voyage. He would wish to provide his son with the most accurate charts; to lay down every rock and shoal, to warn him against every quicksand and whirlpool, and to guard him, as far as possible, against those perils which he had himself encountered. So would I guard you, my dear child, if it were possible, against

those snares and perils which encompass you. But it is *not* possible. I can, it is true, point them out to you, but you will learn to avoid them only by having suffered from them. The lessons which you have to learn cannot be learned for you by another. The deceitfulness and treachery of your own heart, the delusiveness of the world, and the abounding grace and love of Christ, cannot be taught in words.

This is one of the saddest facts about the Christian life; that we learn only by our own experience. We will not believe what others tell us of sin, of ourselves, or of Christ. We must learn that sin is a serpent, by feeling its sting; that we cannot walk alone, by repeated falls; that Christ is all in all, by receiving his fulness. Thus it is that we do not learn to live till life is ended.

But there is one consolation respecting you, Maria, and all others in similar circumstances —an abundant consolation. It is, that you are in the hands of a wise and gracious Saviour. I need not fear to trust you in his hands. His tenderness and compassion are far greater than mine; and if you are indeed his child,

he will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able to bear. In the darkest hours he will still prepare light for you. When you think him afar off, he will still be near. Even the floods of deep waters shall not overflow you, and in the valley of the shadow of death, his rod and his staff shall comfort you.

Therefore, my daughter, rejoice in God and take courage. No enemy can prevail against you, so long as you trust in Christ. Nothing but sin can separate you from him. Take hold of his Almighty arm and go forward.

Your affectionate father.

REPLY TO LETTER I.

MY DEAR FATHER,

I am very much obliged to you for your kind letter. I have several times begun to write to you, but my feelings have changed so often, that before the letter was sent, I always concluded to write another. I have had already some of those trials you speak of. Indeed, it seems to me sometimes as if I never could have any worse ones—at least as if I

never could bear to see any more of my sinfulness, for what I see now almost discourages me. As to making resolutions, I am quite tired of it; they do so little good. And yet I cannot help making them; for when I see how good and kind Christ is, I *must* resolve to serve him better and love him more. It seems then certain that I never shall forsake him again—but perhaps the very next day, or even the next hour, all these feelings are gone, and my heart is as hard as a rock.

To-day I am tolerably happy. When I was reading the Bible this morning, I came to that verse, "And they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." It seemed as if I had never read it before, and it was so sweet to commit myself to such a Saviour, and feel *sure* that I should never be taken out of his hands. When I see such things, I wonder how the little trials of this life can affect me so much.

It seems a great pity that we cannot learn by other people's experience. It is strange too; if I really believe what you tell me—and I am sure I do—why must I learn it over again? I don't know what to make of myself,

but I believe I have two hearts and two selves at once. It is time to go to school now, so good bye, dear father.

Your affectionate daughter

MARIA.

LETTER II.

You wonder at yourself, my dear child, and well you may, that you cannot learn by other people's experience. But you will soon find out that this is not the worst or the strangest thing about yourself. Even in common life we have to learn by our own experience. You know the common proverb that, "a burnt child dreads the fire;" and *one* experience of this kind is generally sufficient. But in religion, we will not learn even by our own experience; after having been a thousand times scorched by the fires of sin, we run into them again. While yet smarting under the chastisement which one transgression has brought upon us, we commit another. Almost before we have recovered from one fall, occasioned by trusting in our own strength, we trust and fall again.

You think that you could not bear any more severe trials, or more distressing views of your sinfulness, than you have already had. Very

probably you could not bear them now, because you have so feeble and inadequate conceptions of the fulness that is in Christ, and so little faith in him. As your faith grows, you will be able to bear clearer and clearer discoveries of your own heart; and as your sense of sin increases, you will need stronger faith to enable you to take hold of Christ in spite of it. These two elements—the knowledge of ourselves and the knowledge of Christ should grow together. If we make progress in the knowledge of our sins faster than in the knowledge of Christ, the result is discouragement and despondency.

Yes, my daughter, the views of sin which now almost overwhelm, will, in a few years, appear to you wholly inadequate. You will feel, in looking back to the present moment, that you knew nothing, absolutely nothing, of that heart which is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. But be not discouraged with the thought. You know *as* little of the condescending grace and love of your Redeemer, and you never can have as much reason for despondency in yourself, as you have for joy and confidence in him.

REPLY TO LETTER II.

DEAR FATHER,

I WRITE because I want a letter from you so much, but I am sure I don't know how to describe my feelings to you. They are so contradictory and changeable that they are hardly the same, two days together. One day I find a great deal of pleasure in secret prayer, and Christ seems very near; the next day my thoughts are wandering off to the ends of the earth, and I hardly know what I am saying. Last week it was so for two or three days whenever I tried to pray; and I could not help thinking it would be better not to pray at all, than to mock God by such prayers. When I am so cold and unfeeling, it does not do me the least good to think that I *ought* to feel differently, and that I am very wicked to be so insensible; my heart remains just as hard and cold. My dear father, I hope you will tell me what to do when I have no feeling. * * *

LETTER III.

MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

To give up prayer because you do not feel like it, would be like saying, "I will not take any medicine now, because I am sick; but when I get well, I will take some." Or as if a hungry beggar should say, "I will not beg for food now, because I am hungry, but when I get over my hunger, I will ask for some."

Just in proportion to your reluctance to pray is your need of prayer. And if you have no feeling, how are you to get it, but by praying? Never, therefore, *never* give up the attempt to pray, because you are disinclined to it. If you find your heart hard and cold, tell God that it is so. Mourn over your coldness before him; and if at first you cannot mourn, with any depth of contrition, yet in the attempt to bring your sins before God, his spirit may meet and aid you.

But remember also, what I have often told you, that you cannot, by a direct effort, that is, by simply willing it, call up any holy emotion. If you want to get more love to Christ, the way to obtain it is not to reproach yourself continually for the want of it, but to *look at Christ.* Take some scene in his life, or some perfection of his character, or some one of his offices, and meditate on it fixedly. If your heart is unaffected by the first view, look again, and keep looking, with prayer to God that he would reveal himself unto you.

It may seem to you like humility, when it is suggested to your mind, that "it is better to cease praying altogether, than to mock God with such miserable pretences of prayer." But beware of such suggestions. Beware of any suggestions which would keep you *away from God.* They can never, under any circumstances, be right ones.

Another caution. Do not estimate your religious state, or your religious progress, by your *feelings*, and especially by the enjoyment you have in prayer. It is often the case with young Christians, that if their affections are a good deal excited in prayer, in the morning,

they look back on the whole day with satisfaction, and feel that they are getting along very well. But this is a very deceptive test. There is a great deal of animal feeling, mingled with the holy emotions of every Christian. In some cases, and especially with young Christians, it would be nearer the truth to say that there is, in their most holy moments, a little spark of holy feeling, mingled with a great deal of animal excitement. And as some persons are more easily excited to feeling than others, the degree of emotion is not a sure test of the amount of religion.

Christ says, "If ye love me, *keep my commandments.*" Inquire every day if you have more of this evidence of love, if you are overcoming sin, if you are less proud, less selfish, less worldly, and have more of the self-denying, humble, benevolent temper of the Saviour. That this may be the case with you is the prayer of

Your father.

REPLY TO LETTER III.

DEAR FATHER,

SINCE I received your letter I have been more unhappy than I was before. The only thing I had to comfort me was, that I sometimes find a good deal of pleasure in prayer, and feel something, though not half so much as I want to do, of love to God and sorrow for sin. But if even this is only animal feeling, I do not see what reason I have to hope that I am a Christian, for I am sure there is nothing in my *conduct* that is like one.

If I could see that I made any progress at all, if it was ever so little, I should not feel so. But how can I help being discouraged when I grow worse every day. My dear father, you cannot possibly imagine half the wickedness of my heart. If I seem to mourn ever so much over my sinfulness, when I pray in the morning, and make ever so many resolutions for the day, I forget them all in an hour; and if

any thing happens to vex me, I get angry directly. I do not see that I am any less proud or less selfish, or less passionate than I used to be. Sometimes it seems as if I *must* give up trying; but I cannot bear to think of being always as I am now, so I keep on. Dear father, I am sorry to trouble you with my complaints, when you have so many cares and burdens; but if I write at all, I *must* complain; and I have waited as long as I could, in the hope that I should have something more pleasant to tell you.

LETTER IV.

MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

THERE are many things I might say in answer to your letter; at present I will confine myself to one point only. It is *absolutely necessary* that you should be left to learn that your own strength is weakness. Probably you think you know this now, but you need to learn it better. It is the *first* lesson that Christ teaches his scholars. The *second* is that in his strength they can do all things.

Now there is no way in which you can learn this lesson, but by being left to *try* your own strength. So long as God is with you and affords you aid, you have no opportunity to find what you are in yourself. It is very likely, nay, quite certain, that you will presently begin to think that you owe all your success to your own arm, and that, after all, you have *some* wisdom and goodness, and strength of your own. Suppose a father wishes his son

to learn that he cannot *write*—will he attempt to convince him of it by taking his hand and guiding it to form the letters, or by leaving him to try alone?

If, when God affords you his aid, you would acknowledge it as his, would give all the glory to him, and be sensible of your own weakness, it would not be necessary that God should thus leave you. But you know that this is not the case. You know that one day, even, in which you are enabled in some measure to observe your good resolutions, is sufficient to make you self-complacent and self-confident. Then God is obliged to give you another lesson in humility.

And how much, yea, what infinite patience does our heavenly Father need, to be willing to repeat his lessons so often! To teach such perverse and unruly children! It takes most Christians all their lives to learn perfectly this simple lesson—though they have something which ought to teach it to them every day.

Now do not let these remarks have the effect of reconciling you to sin, or making you think lightly of it. If you should, you will extract poison from a truth which ought to do

you good. The effect should be this. When you find your heart, so averse to good, so cold and ungrateful, so indisposed to holy duties as you have described,—instead of being surprised and discouraged, reflect, "This is the natural fruit of my depraved heart. It is a new proof of what I knew before, that in me dwelleth no good thing. Let me be humbled before God, on account of it, and let me rely the more simply and earnestly on Christ for aid."

LETTER V.

MY DEAR MARIA,

THERE is another point on which you need counsel, which I had not time to take up in my last letter. I warned you against looking to feelings and frames of mind for evidences of growth in grace. But you spend too much time in prying into and examining yourself, and too little in studying Christ. Some persons are much more in danger of this extreme than others, and you are one of them. I do not mean, of course, to dissuade you from self-examination. But if you spend most of your hours of solitude in searching out the evils of your own heart, how are you to get strength to overcome those evils? It is necessary that you should be acquainted with them, just as it is necessary that a sick man should know himself to be sick, in order that he may apply to a physician. But if he spends all his time in examining into the nature of his

disease, and studying its symptoms, without applying a remedy, he will be likely to grow worse instead of better.

There is no curative virtue in the knowledge of our sins. The cure is effected by looking to Jesus. Those who were bitten by the fiery serpents received healing from looking at the brazen serpent raised by Moses, not by looking at their own wounds.

The state of mind produced by incessant and exclusive brooding over one's own sins, is productive of many evils. It is a morbid state, in which nothing is seen as it is, and the mists and clouds engendered by it, often hide Christ entirely from view.

Besides, the best and only true view of sin is to be had at the feet of the Saviour. Looking at sin without him, may produce remorse and anguish; but it does not break the heart. It does not make the sinner love, while he grieves, and hope, even in the midst of distress; and no repentance is acceptable to God from which these elements are excluded. It is love and trust which distinguish the filial repentance of the child, from the remorse of the criminal or the slave.

Two things are declared in the Bible to be necessary to salvation,—repentance and faith. You are in danger of overlooking the second of these requisites altogether, and of making religion to consist altogether in repentance. This would be a fatal error, since faith is the great channel through which divine blessings flow down to us; and the *daily* exercise of faith is necessary to keep up that intercourse between God and our souls, by which we live. It will do you no good to be sensible of your wants, unless you go and take of the fulness which is to supply them. Faith is the hand which grasps the blessing. It is the act by which the soul plunges itself in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, and is washed from its guilt.

This act is one which cannot be described to an unregenerate person, it is one of the "things of the Spirit of God," which "the natural man receiveth not, because it is spiritually discerned. But the Christian knows it well; he remembers the sweet peace which followed its first performance, when, after tossing on a troubled sea, he found a secure haven, and rested on the faithfulness of God.

And every exercise of faith is followed by a similar enjoyment. What happiness to rely fully on the promises of God, to trust in his love, to lean on the bosom of the Saviour as a child on the breast of its mother!

Christ loves to be thus confided in. He is worthy of such confidence. And when he enables us to exercise it, no outward or inward trials can much affect us. There is no evil, temporal or spiritual, for which this is not a remedy. On this eminence the soul may sit secure, and smile at angry foes. On this summit the sunlight of God's countenance ever rests, and all the storms of this world may rage, but they are in a lower region.

REPLY TO LETTER V.

MY DEAR FATHER,

I AM a great deal happier than I was when I wrote you last. For some days after that, I seemed to be getting worse and worse, and at last, I fell into a sort of hopeless, sullen state, thinking that nothing would ever do me any good. I tried to read the Bible and other good

books, but the words passed through my mind as if they had no meaning. I gave up all hope of doing anything for myself, and it seemed as if I did not care what became of me.

That afternoon, one of the little girls who boards in the same house with me, was sitting on the stairs, studying her Bible lesson aloud. My door was open, and I heard her saying, over and over, "And she came and worshipped him, saying, Lord help me." I do not know why this verse should do me good; it must have been owing to the blessing of God. My heart was melted in an instant, and I could do nothing but weep at Christ's feet. It seemed to be just the prayer I needed to offer, and I could not help repeating, "Lord, help me," again and again. Oh, how good he is! It does not seem as if I could ever grieve him again.

I think, dear father, your letter will do me a great deal of good. I am sure the difficulty with me was the very one you describe. I was looking at myself all the time, and not at Christ, and this made me so hopeless and sullen. But now I will look at Christ all the time.

LETTER VI.

MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

We act like children who employ themselves in building card-houses. No sooner is their fabric reared, than the slightest disturbance overthrows it from the foundation. For a moment they are quite troubled and discouraged, but presently set to work again, in the same way, only to meet with new disappointments.

We are continually striving to erect an edifice of self-righteousness. God is determined that we shall not succeed, for he knows that to do so would ruin us. Therefore, just as our stately fabric is reared, and we are beginning to say with Nebuchadnezzar, "Is not this the great Babylon that I have built?" he allows some temptation to assail us, which in a moment overthrows the whole structure. Then we are overwhelmed with shame and despondency; we declare, for the thousandth

time, that *now* we have learned we can do nothing; it is useless to try; we may as well give up at once. Thus we complain for a while, but presently go to work again to build up a new structure.

And it is curious what *very* slight foundations will serve us to erect quite a tall building upon. If we have been remiss in the performance of some obvious duty, and God awakens us to a sense of our neglect, and enables us to perform the duty,—up shoots the building of self-righteousness on this foundation. Instead of being humbled for the past neglect, we are proud of the present performance. Thus we alternate between the two extremes of self-righteousness and despondency. Whatever grace and help God grants us, we make use of to raise a fabric of our own merits; and when he withdraws his aid, we immediately begin to murmur, and say that our case is hopeless, that it is in vain to wait upon the Lord any longer.

But of one thing be assured. God will not give us grace that we may consume it upon our lusts; that it may minister to our pride and self-love. When we are prepared to give

him all the glory, then, and then only, may we expect great blessings.

But, my dear child, be not discouraged. Although you may not see how you are to be brought through all these sins and temptations—these snares and difficulties, to heaven, yet, God does see. Trust in him. The work is his. Plead with him on this ground. Tell him that he has begun a work in your heart, which you neither could nor would have begun of yourself, and ask him to carry on unto perfection, what he has thus undertaken. Press on, my child, there is no other way; and remember that Christian when he was afraid to meet the lions,—saw that it was as dangerous to go back as to go forward.

"They that endure to the end shall be saved," and if you should ever be so happy as to get to heaven, you will not regard one of the trials or privations you underwent on the road. If you have any regret, it will be that you have not toiled or suffered more.

REPLY TO LETTER VI.

DEAR FATHER,

If you had looked into my heart, you could not have written anything more suited to my state than your last letter. I was just trying to raise such a building of self-righteousness as you speak of, though I was not aware of it. I was beginning to form some rules and plans for my conduct, and especially for my seasons of devotion, and thought I was going to do a great deal better than ever before.

When your letter came, it was just like a ray of light, shining into my heart. But then it was so discouraging, to find that I could be so deceived about my feelings and motives, and suppose that I was doing right while I was not; that I should have been quite in despair if it had not been for the latter part of your letter. I thank you, dear father, for your exhortations and encouragements, and hope they will do me good. If I could only think of heaven all the time, I should be willing to undergo anything, and never be discouraged.

LETTER VII.

* * * I WISH to say a few words to you, Maria, about acquiring religious knowledge. You should make this a distinct object, and endeavour to grow every day in the understanding of divine truth. There is danger of neglecting this, with persons who have been educated from childhood, as you have, in the knowledge of the Bible. They have, of course, a general acquaintance with the system of divine truth, and are apt to suppose that they know enough. But there are various degrees of knowing and understanding. You, for example, know in general, what is the work and office of the Holy Spirit, and very possibly you suppose that you know all that is necessary to be known on this point. But if you should devote especial attention to the subject, studying the Bible by comparing Scripture with Scripture, and by meditating on each particular, you would find your views

becoming much more distinct, and your knowledge more clear. Your present understanding of the subject would then seem to you very imperfect.

And thus you might go on, making progress in knowledge as long as you live; for divine truth can never be exhausted. The longer we explore, the more we shall see.

It is in vain to object, as is sometimes done, that knowledge does not necessarily lead to piety, and that one may have the best possible understanding of divine truth without loving and obeying it. This is true, but it is true also that the natural fruit of knowledge, *in a Christian*, is spiritual advancement.—Every religious truth is designed and adapted to produce a certain effect upon the heart and life, and this effect will be produced, other things being equal, in proportion to the clearness with which truth is apprehended. If the effect does not follow, it proves that the heart is wrong.

Be not contented, then, with simply *reading* a portion of Scripture every day, but *study* the Bible. And, in order that you may have a distinct end in view, have some subject of

investigation. Let the Bible be its own interpreter, and it will make its meaning plain.—But in order that this should be the case you must study with the right spirit, and of this I shall have more to say in my next. Meantime ponder these passages.—Col. i. 9.—Eph. i. 17, 18: v. 17.—Phil. i. 9.—2 Pet. i. 5, and others of similar import.

LETTER VIII.

I PROMISED, my dear child, to give you some farther directions as to the spirit with which you should study the Bible. In order to grow in spiritual wisdom, you must not seek to gratify curiosity, or simply to gratify that natural instinct which makes us desire to investigate and understand every subject that comes under our notice. When labouring to acquire a distinct apprehension of any particular truth, let the ultimate aim be, *distinctly*, that your heart may be suitably affected by it, and that it may bring forth fruit in your life. Thus your head and heart will work together and grow together. It is for want of this, that knowledge is so often found disconnected from holiness, and that those who spend their whole lives in the investigation of Biblical truth, are often but little, if at all, benefited by it.

Here, as in every thing else, God looks at

our motives. If you study the Bible in order to be admired for your acquaintance with it, to gratify curiosity, or with an arrogant desire to solve all difficulties and penetrate all mysteries, you can not expect a blessing. *Humility* is the very first requisite for growth in the knowledge that edifieth. You must have the spirit of a little child, and, like a new born babe, desire the sincere milk of the word.—You must feel your need of divine illumination, and continually seek it, mingling prayer with study, and never for a moment supposing that you can make any progress alone. May God give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.

REPLY TO LETTERS VII. AND VIII.

I AM very much obliged to you, dear father, for the directions in your last two letters. I *have* had the very feeling you described, that I had less need to grow in knowledge than in any thing else; and even now, it seems as if I needed to practise what I do know, instead of learning more, for I know, so much better than

I *do*. Still I am sure that you, dear father, are the best judge, and I am going to study as you recommended, only I have not much time out of school.

I have been as happy as possible for some time. I seem to see God in everything, and to have Christ in my heart, whatever I am about. This morning I saw so plainly his glory as God and man united, that I could not love and admire him enough. To think that he can be so great and powerful, and yet our Friend and Brother! Oh, how wonderful! I hope I shall never forsake him again.

I have just met with some resolutions that President Edwards made after he became a Christian. I like them very much, and am going to copy off part of them, and read them over every morning, to see if I cannot keep them through the day. Good-bye, dear father, I must go to my lessons.

LETTER IX.

If everbody should adopt your rule, Maria, and make no attempt to grow in knowledge till their practice perfectly corresponded to what they knew already, I fear they would never grow either in knowledge or piety. It would be about as wise a plan as if a writing-master should give his pupils a very imperfect copy to write after, at first, telling them that when they could equal that, they should have a better. The higher our standard, other things being equal, the higher will be our attainments.

I was glad to find from your last letter that you were happier, and that your happiness arose from the presence of Christ. God gives his children cordials, occasionally, to revive their spirits and encourage them to go on in the right way. But the great question is, not whether we have many of these by the way, but whether we are making progress. Chris-

tian's road lay through the Valley of Humiliation, and even the Valley of the Shadow of Death; but he was still getting nearer to the Celestial City, while he was passing through them, as well as while he travelled over the Delectable mountains, and through the pleasant Land of Beulah. When such comforts are granted you, remember that their design is, not that you should rest in them and grow careless, as if all your difficulties were over, but that you should gather strength and courage for future conflicts. Endeavour to improve such favourable moments, when you find the Spirit of God near you, and your heart unusually drawn out towards divine things, by devoting more time than usual to religious duties. Remember that such favoured moments do not last forever, (although you may think so, now that your mountain stands strong,) therefore let your soul "follow hard after God," while "his right hand upholds you."

Remember, too, that this is not a favourable time in which to grow in grace yourself; it is also the time to do good to others. When your own heart is full of divine love, your

words will have most effect on the hearts of sinners. There are, doubtless, many of your school-fellows without religion; and you, as a professor of religion, must and will exert some influence over them. Inquire often whether it is of the right kind, and whether you are doing all in your power to save their souls.

Your affectionate father.

REPLY TO LETTER IX.

Oh! my dear father, all my joy is gone, and I am as unhappy as ever. I can see now that my heart was full of pride, when I wrote that letter to you, though I did not suspect it at the time. I had that sort of pleasant and comfortable feeling, which I always have when I am making resolutions, but I did not know that it was pride. I see now that I *was* proud; just as proud because I *intended* to keep those resolutions, as if I really *had* kept them. And I have a great mind to say that I never will make any more resolutions, because I think there is always a great deal of pride in them. I should not have thought, that any

body *could* be proud of *future* goodness; especially if the same person had always broken his resolutions before. And to be proud of being humble, too! It seems to me as if there was no other sin in the world but pride; I mean it seems so much the worst of all sins. And besides, I don't see how it is possible to overcome it; for if I strive against it, then I begin to be proud of that very thing.

Dear father, what *can* I do? It seems hopeless to think of such a heart as mine ever being made holy. Oh! I cannot help being discouraged. I do not see, either, how it would help me to have more faith in Christ. I do believe, now, that he is perfectly able and willing to save me, if I will let him, but if I have a heart that will not let him, if I turn his very gifts into poison, by being proud of them, what *can* be done?

Besides, it is not from doubting whether I shall finally be saved, that I am unhappy. I hardly ever have such doubts long at a time, or at least I do not think much about it. But it is not much comfort to think that I shall get to heaven at last, if I am to keep on sinning and grieving the Saviour all my life. I

look every way and can see no comfort. Oh! this wretched, sinful heart! I can not go to Christ, for if he helps me, it will only make me proud again. What can I do?

LETTER X.

MY DEAR CHILD,

You are not yet sufficiently penetrated with the full and glorious meaning of *salvation by grace.* What *does* it mean, my daughter? Think upon it; plunge your soul in it, as it were; explore its length and breadth.

Does it mean that, although you are to be saved *in the main* by Christ, you are to be indebted *a little* to your own goodness, your own efforts, your own prayers? Does it mean that though God is willing, for Christ's sake, to forgive a certain part of your debt, the rest you must *pay?* Does it mean that, although when you have sinned seven times you need not fear to repent and return, yet when you have sinned seventy times seven, God's mercy is exhausted, and you must despair? Does it mean that you must be *ashamed* to go to him when you have greatly sinned; — that you must wait and wait, hoping *somehow* to get a

little better before you go to him—to have a little goodness to carry in your hand, and ask him to receive you for the sake of that?

Oh, my child, it is *all* grace; *free* grace; boundless, inexhaustible grace. There is no blessing out of God's mercy with your goodness—it is *all* mercy. You have *no* goodness—you never can have any;—God knew this when he undertook to save you;—it was for this reason he undertook to save you, and now he wants none of your fancied goodness; he wants you simply to trust in him?

You see, therefore, that faith in Christ is not necessary, merely to preserve you from doubts of your final salvation. It furnishes just the support you need, against discouragement from *present* sinfulness. If *you* were required to do the work, or even the smallest fraction of it, by yourself, you might well despond. But it is not so. What if you *have* such a proud heart as you describe? Christ knows it; and knew it when he undertook to save you. It was *from* this very heart that he undertook to save you. Remember that the salvation promised by Christ is not a salvation *in* sin, but *from* sin. If then you believe that

Christ has undertaken the work of your salvation—and you say you do not ordinarily doubt that he has done so—then believe also that he has undertaken to free you from the dominion of sin. And *he will do it.* Yes, my dear child, believe and rejoice; he will do it. Christ never began what he did not complete. You may not see how he is doing it. You may not understand the meaning and use of all his dealings with you, but trust in him that he knows. He is leaving you to perceive the pride of your heart as the very means of freeing you from pride.

Do not displease him, then, by distrusting either his wisdom or goodness. You do distrust one or the other whenever you indulge despondency, and ask how it is possible you should ever be saved. Unbelief and pride are at the bottom of such despondency—unbelief of his promises; pride which makes you unwilling to cast yourself on *mere* grace. But you must put these away at once—you must believe that you are still a child, even when you have sinned; (that is, of course, if you strive against sin and repent of it)—and shall a child fear to go to his father, and say,

"I repent?" Yes, believe that God loves you; and let your heart break that you have not more loved him.

REPLY TO LETTER X.

My dear, *dear* father, I do not know how to thank you enough, or love you enough. I am sure I never can thank you enough for the unwearied patience you have had in teaching me so many years, while I have been so slow to learn. And I thank you for your last letter. It did me a great deal of good, at first, and I have read it every day since. At first, I believe I was able to trust in Christ just as you directed me; and O how sweet it was, to feel the burden of sin all rolled off! But since then it has come back in part. If I try to believe, and say to myself that Christ loves and pities me,—then something replies, "It is presumption to think so. Just as if he *could* love such a hateful creature as you are." And then it seems as if my sins were so great that I *ought* to be discouraged; as if the commands in the Bible to hope and to rejoice were ad-

dressed to very holy Christians, and to those who are gaining the victory over sin. It *must* be presumption in me to be as confident and as happy as such persons may be and ought to be. * * * * *

LETTER XI.

MY DEAR CHILD,

ONCE and forever let the error be thoroughly rooted out of your mind, that there is any humility in distrust. I see how it is—you rather encourage feelings of despondency, because you suppose that they are an evidence of humility. So far is this from being the case, that they are but one form of pride.

Consider a moment. You *profess* to believe that you are a poor, miserable, ignorant, helpless sinner; that you cannot of yourself think one right thought; that Christ is your wisdom, and strength, and righteousness; and that he is engaged to save you—not because he saw any thing lovely or attractive in you, but out of mere mercy. The very first experience you have that you *are* just what you professed to *believe* yourself, you are surprised, discouraged, afraid to trust in Christ, and almost driven to despair. Now does not this

·ay, as plainly as *words* can say it, "Well, after all, I did not suppose I was quite so weak and sinful; I thought I had *some* goodness, and some strength; but now I see that I have none; of course there is no hope for me. Christ will not love me or save me now —he did not come to save the utterly lost and helpless, but those who can do something towards saving themselves."

What strange language is this! The fact is, despondency is pride, only it is pride *mortified;* and in that form you have not yet learned to detect it. But pride mortified, is pride still; and no more resembles humility, in God's opinion, than pride gratified. Humility does not consist in seeing ourselves to be sinners, nor in despairing of help; for this Judas saw and felt—this the devils see and feel. It consists in seeing ourselves to be weak and sinful without repining at it—seeing it, and being willing to see it—seeing it, and being willing that others should see it too. In fewer words, it is a *willingness to be nothing;* and when we have this feeling, we are always ready to go to Christ. If you cannot go to him, when you are sensible of your

own worthlessness, it proves that before, when you thought you were trusting in him, you were trusting in yourself.

Suppose the prodigal son, when he "came to himself" had said, "I have sinned against my father so greatly, in leaving his house and wasting his property, that I dare not return; it would be presumption in me to tell him that I repent, or to ask him to forgive me; I will therefore stay away forever." Would this have been right reasoning? Would it have indicated true humility?

As to this doctrine leading you to think lightly of sin, you can judge for yourself whether you are most grieved at having offended me, when you have the least or the most confidence in my love to you. With a slave, who obeyed only from fear, it might have this effect, but not with a child. This is the apostle's reasoning. Rom. vi., "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound: God forbid! how *shall* we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

REPLY TO LETTER XI.

DEAR FATHER,

YOUR letter convinced me for a time, that I had never known any thing of true humility, and made me fear that I never should. It is the hardest of all things for me, to be willing to be nothing. It is very difficult to be willing to be so in my own esteem, and still harder to consent to be so in the eyes of others. Very often, when I have seemed to be humbled before God, and have not been able to find words strong enough to express my self-abhorrence, yet the very next moment, if any body contradicted or laughed at me, I grew angry, as if I was the wisest and best of any body in the world. And this desire to be something in other people's opinion, is such a part of myself, that it seems as if I should not be the same person, if I got rid of it. And yet the opposite temper looks very lovely and very desirable.

But I was telling you how your letter made me feel. When I began to think that I had never been really humbled at all, this dis-

couraged me, and then I remembered that this very despondency was only mortified pride, and this made the matter worse. I do not know what would have become of me if something had not drawn me to Christ, and led me to fall down at his feet, and tell him all my troubles. I did seem, then, to have some of that willingness to be nothing which you described, dear father; and though I saw that there was no good thing in me, yet it did not make me unhappy—at least, not as I had been before, for it seemed of little consequence who or what I was, if Christ was only glorified. While I had such views of him, it was very easy to be willing to be nothing. I knew then that I had had such feelings before, and the difficulty seems to be that they never last.

But I have not time to write any more about myself now, because I want to ask you about somebody else. It is S. E. Ever since she came here she has been in trouble about herself, though I did not know it till last week. Her sister told me before she came here, that she thought S. was a Christian, and had been one a long time, though S. was afraid to believe so herself. The other day we began to

talk together, and though at first we were rather hesitating, yet we have come to speak very freely to each other. At least she does to me, but I have always been so used to talking to nobody but you, dear father, about my feelings, that I cannot say much to any body else.

S. is very different from me, naturally, and I suppose that is the reason our feelings are not more alike, in regard to religion. She is all the time doubting whether she is a Christian or not, and this is the principal source of her troubles. As to me, a voice from heaven to tell me that I am a Christian would not make me happy, when I feel the power of sin as I often do. I do not know what to say to her, for though I am quite sure that she is a Christian, I cannot make her believe so. I am sure I have a hundred times more reason to doubt than she has. She is so afraid of doing wrong, and so watchful against sin, and so grieved when she thinks she has offended the Saviour. I am sure you would say something to do her good, if you could see her; but will you not please to tell me something to say

to her? We are together almost all the time out of school, now, and I think it will do me good to be with her, she is so conscientious, and so much more amiable than I am.

LETTER XII.

MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

I AM glad that you have been led to see something of the nature of true humility, and to desire it. It is indeed one of the loveliest fruits of divine grace, and the farthest from unrenewed human nature. It is the opposite of that self-worship, which is so natural to every human being, that as you say, the getting rid of it is almost like losing ones identity. And is not this agreeable to the representations of the Bible, that those who are in Christ Jesus are *new* creatures? Growth in holiness is nothing more than a gradual dethroning of self, and the exalting of God in its place. It must be your constant effort to grow in this way; and if inordinate love of the praise of men is your besetting sin, then set a double guard at that point. Seek to mortify self in that particular especially, and guard against doing anything simply for the sake of being

seen of men. Each victory will make succeeding ones easier, and each instance in which the voice of conscience is obeyed, will make her more quick to perceive and to reprove sin.

As to the case of S. E. it is an interesting, but not an uncommon one. And though you and she differ in the particular symptoms of your complaint, yet the remedy is the same for both. When men talk of a panacea for physical evils; that is, of a medicine which will cure all diseases, they are justly ridiculed. But there is such a panacea for spiritual maladies; it consists in *looking to Jesus.* Tell your friend not to ponder so much the question whether she is a Christian, but to contemplate Christ; to look at his character, to study his life, to follow him as he went about doing good; to inquire what is his will, and seek to obey it. In looking at him, and obeying his commandments, she will find comfort, if she belongs to the flock; and if not, she will soon find it out. If you and she have different peculiarities of natural, and consequently of religious character, you may be of the more service to each other. It is

wisely ordered by our heavenly Father, that such differences should exist, so that one may hold up another, and they that are strong may bear the infirmities of the weak. Thus did Christian and Hopeful aid each other forward on their journey.

REPLY TO LETTER XII.

Oh! my dear father, my heart is so full I must write to you. I must tell you what a precious Saviour Christ is, and what patience and love he manifests to such a wretch as I am. I see now that there is something greater and more wonderful even than my wickedness and hard-heartedness, and that is the love of Christ. Oh! how wonderful it is; how inconceivable! and how could I ever distrust it. How could I ever despond, and say I must give up, when I have such a Saviour and Friend? How can I ever despond again? It does not seem as if I ever could, or as if I had anything to wish for or to ask for. It seems so certain that Christ loves me, and that he will give me every thing, and do for me every

thing I need, that all I have to do is to leave myself in his hands. How sweet it is to lie there—to give up all fears, all cares, all anxieties, and trust simply in him.

S., too, is happier than she was. Still, she is always afraid, and if there is such a thing as having a *too* tender conscience, I should think hers is so. She is afraid to study her lessons, lest they should take off her thoughts from God, and seems to suppose that it is sinful to think of any thing but religion.

(*Later date.*) I can hardly believe that I am the same person who wrote what is above written. I did not send the letter immediately, thinking I should fill out the sheet in a day or two. But now a week has passed, and I have not one of the feelings I expressed then. When I think of Christ my heart remains perfectly insensible, and my prayers are only words, which have no meaning in them. I am very much hurried with lessons now, besides, so that I have not much time for reading the Bible or prayer. But if I had, it would do me no good now, for I cannot pray. My thoughts are wandering, and my heart is so cold that it is useless to try.

LETTER XIII.

You cannot pray, Maria! Then what is to become of you? God has promised to bestow blessings only in answer to prayer, and if you cannot ask for them, you consent to do without them. The Sovereign of all worlds holds out to you his golden sceptre, and says, "Ask what thou wilt and it shall be given thee," and you have nothing to ask! Your thoughts are so occupied with more important objects, that even when you have entered the audience chamber of the King of kings, you cannot remember what you are there for! Can any thing be more displeasing to God than such conduct as this?

Beware, my daughter, of the least neglect of closet duties. Beware of once omitting to pray, when the stated time arrives; by so doing, you will give Satan an advantage over you, which he will not fail to employ. If you find your heart insensible and averse to the

duty, spend the more time, instead of the less, in it. Seek to bring your icy heart under the beams of divine grace, and do not cease to cry, 'Lord help me,' if you can say nothing more. Do not yield to the suggestion that it is of no use to pray, but remember that God himself, who cannot lie, has *promised* to answer those that call upon him.

REPLY TO LETTER XIII.

MY DEAR FATHER,

MOTHER says in the letter I have just received from her, that you wonder at not hearing from me. The reason is, that I have nothing good to write, and I am tired of sending you complaints and lamentations. I am worse now than I ever was before; not so miserable as I sometimes have been; but unhappy, so far as I have any feeling at all. I have been so ever since I wrote before, except just after receiving your letter, which affected me for the time, and I made an effort to get back to God. But I felt like a person whose feet were tied, trying to walk. I could not

get along a step, and I fell into a sort of melancholy, hopeless state, which has lasted ever since. I do not see what I can do to help myself;—God does not hear my prayers, and I cannot get out of this state any more than I can make a world. I know I am to blame for having such a bad heart, but still, as long as I have it, I do not see that I can do any thing till God is pleased to help me.

LETTER XIV.

Do you know, my dear child, that you are in a dangerous situation? Do you know that you are going back to the excuses you used to give before your heart was renewed? You say you can do nothing till God is pleased to help you. Very true, you cannot. But is this a reason for inactivity and stupidity? If you are thus utterly helpless, thus absolutely dependent, is it not a reason for taking hold of God's strength? If your condition is so helpless in itself, is it not a motive for calling mightily upon God, if perchance he will have mercy upon you?

Remember that you can have no evidence of being a Christian, except as you strive to go forward. Past experience is insecure ground to build on. If you sleep on, your sleep *may* be final.

You are now under the influence of another species of despondency—that which springs

from indolence. It is a very easy way to get rid of a duty, to say, *I have no power*. It is much easier to say, "I am so helpless that I can do nothing," than it is to strive, and watch, and pray, and repent and fight.

But if you cannot do every thing of yourself, you can do some things. You can attend punctually to the outward observances of religion. You can keep your studies, and all other worldly interests, in their proper place, and not allow them to take from the time which should be spent in the closet. You can *wait for* God, humbly, patiently, and earnestly, suffering nothing to fill up the void in your heart, which his absence has left. If you wait thus, watching "more than they that watch for the morning," you shall not wait long in vain. But if you wait in sloth, in despondency, you have no promise to encourage you. There is reason to fear that you will become accustomed to your present state, and be classed among those who are "at ease in Zion."

LETTER XV.

MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

YOUR long silence leads me to fear that you are in the same state in which your last letter described you—or a worse one. When the first step is taken in declension from God, no one can say where it will lead. Each step makes the return more difficult, and the thought of it more disagreeable. If you have entered upon this path, my child, I tremble for you. Having obtained one advantage over you, Satan will be encouraged to attempt still more. And having once yielded, you will find it harder now to resist.

But there is only one course left for you. If you do not adopt it, you are lost. You must return to God, and you must do it *now*. I beseech you, my dear child, to pause, *this moment*, and consider what you are doing. Have you determined to forsake Christ forever? Are you prepared to say, "I will have no part or

lot with Jesus Christ? I renounce his service, and will henceforth please only myself?" No; you shrink with horror from such suggestions. You expect, sometime or other, and somehow or other, to return to your allegiance, and to walk again in the way of his commandments. But consider what this means. You are taking one step after another, with the knowledge that you shall be obliged to retrace them. You are doing what you know you shall hereafter repent of—though you do *not* know how bitterly.

Besides, if you expect to return to the Saviour, and to be received by him, you expect to be pardoned for the very sins you are now committing. You expect that in infinite tenderness and compassion he will pardon your transgressions, wash away all your guilt, and own you once more as a child. And can you bear to go on sinning against such love? Does not the thought break and melt your heart? Does it not constrain you to go back at once to your Saviour, and wash his feet with tears of sorrow?

There is one means of keeping you from Christ, which your great adversary will proba-

bly make use of. He will tell you that you ought to be ashamed to go back now, after having wandered so long, and this foolish and wicked shame may perhaps keep you still longer at a distance from the Saviour. But remember that this is only pride. You are unwilling to go back, empty and helpless; you would fain do something first to make a little atonement for your sins, that Christ may the more willingly receive you. But this you cannot do. You *must* go empty, or not at all. And the longer you stay away, the more you will have to repent of and be ashamed of. The best thing you can do, therefore, nay, the *only* thing you can do, is to return at once. Go humble, penitent, broken-hearted, yet go confiding in Christ's love. And if you say, I cannot go so, for I have not such feelings;—still *go;* go and tell the Saviour what a hard heart you have, and beg him to soften it.

REPLY TO LETTER XV.

MY DEAR FATHER,

I HARDLY know how to begin, I have so much to say—or rather, I want words strong enough to express what I would say. My own vileness, and the goodness of God—which shall I speak of first? which is most wonderful? You were right in supposing that I had wandered very far from God. I made some new efforts to return, after your letter before the last, but they did no good. I felt like a captive who has been trying to break his chain, but who, in consequence, finds it riveted more firmly upon him. At first I was unhappy, but gradually I grew more accustomed to this state of things: my conscience was almost silent, and I became wholly absorbed in my school and my studies. In this way I managed to shut out the thoughts of God, for a great deal of the time; but my Sabbaths were miserable days enough. I kept growing more sullen and more hopeless—saying to myself that I could do nothing, and that, though I *was* a most vile and wretched sinner, yet it

was my fate never to be any better, and I must submit to it.

At length, however, this sullen mood gave place to a more tender one. It seemed as if I longed to repent and return to Christ, if I dared to. The sermon I heared at church last Sabbath affected me, but when I found my heart melting, and my eyes filling with tears, I resisted it, saying to myself, No, no; if I repent, it will only be to sin again, to try the patience of my Saviour anew—I will not mock him by such a repentance. I believe now that this is the very feeling you meant to warn me against, dear father, when you spoke of false shame. Your letter came the next day, and I could not hold out any longer. I could not *help* repenting, and I felt that Christ did not reject me, that he received and forgave me just as soon as I turned to him. I thought of the prodigal son, and how when he began to go back to his father's house, his father *ran to meet him*, and it seemed as if I never had such a view of the compassion of Christ before.

And then, when I remembered that it was he who had inclined me to come back, that he

took pity on me when I was so sullen, so hard, so vile and hateful. O, my dear father, what love! How impossible ever to make the least return for it; for the more grateful we are, the more we love, and praise, and thank him, so much the more we are indebted to him for giving us those feelings. To sin against him again seems worse than death, and the fear that I shall be left to do so oppresses me continually. I almost wish to be put out of existence, so as not to sin any more. Dear father, do pray for me—do pray that I may not be left to wander again.

I think I never have had such a sense of the dreadful *ingratitude* of sin as now. Before I have thought almost wholly of myself, and been mortified and distressed to see how vile I was. Now I can only think of Christ, and how my sins wound and grieve him. O if I could only hope that these feelings would last! What a pity it seems that we cannot, by one act, determine all our future acts! What a pity that if I feel ever so much love or gratitude, or penitence now, it does not secure me from committing the worst sins to-morrow! Good-bye, dear father. Do pray for

Your affectionate daughter.

LETTER XVI.

MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

I PRAISE God for his goodness to you, in restoring you to his love, after such a season of wandering. It is well that you should be afraid of being left to a similar declension, for this fear will make you watchful and prayerful. But do not let Satan turn this very safeguard into a temptation by suggesting that you can never fall while you are so watchful. Only while you trust—not in your own watchfulness, your own prayers, your own strivings—but simply in Christ are you safe.

The regret which you express that we can not, by a single act, take hold of the future, so as irrevocably to determine its character, is one which thousands, I doubt not, have felt before you. It is indeed a most melancholy and heart-piercing thought to one who, after having sinned, has been restored to the favour of God, that he shall sin again, and again

ungratefully wound the Saviour who has pardoned him. But we must beware of representing the matter to ourselves in such a way as to destroy our own accountability, or lessen our guilt. There is no *fatality* in the matter; the only *necessity* for sinning lies in our sinfulness, which will be sure to break out into act, unless God restrains it, or more properly extirpates it.

The fact is that we *are* capable, to some extent, of determining the chararacter of our future lives by a single act, and every person who is regenerated, does this. He does alter the *general character* of his future life by a single act; the grace of God enabling him, and the only reason why, in many cases, this act does not exert a determining influence over *every* future act and state, so as to preserve from sin, is that it is not a sincere and entire act of the whole soul. If the surrender of the whole *being* to God, is really made, if the old man is "crucified" and "dead," then there will be no hesitation, and halting, and going back in the race. Thus it was with Paul, and thus it is with some Christians in later days. Here, one act influences every future

act, and thought, and purpose, and word, of the individual.

But where the surrender is not entire,—where there is an attempt to reconcile the service of God and the service of the world,—where a portion of the heart is given to God, but self still holds a large place in the affections, such a consistent and equable progress cannot of course be expected. If there is any progress, it is slow, halting and interrupted; so that it is difficult for observers, and often for the individual himself, to say whether there is any advance or not. Such persons enjoy neither God or the world. They are always complaining and disconsolate, reproved by conscience, and professedly desiring to do better, yet their desires are those of the sluggard "who desireth and hath nothing."

They are useless incumbrances to the church, and their example does harm rather than good. They can never claim the promises with any confidence, knowing that they have not fulfilled the conditions. They pray without expecting their prayers to be answered, because there is a secret consciousness, that they do not really desire the things they

ask for, above every thing else; and that while they say, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us," their hearts prefer other things. If you belong to this miserable class of persons, Maria, I advise you to leave it without delay.

REPLY TO LETTER XVI.

MY DEAR FATHER,

YOUR letter has filled me with doubts, and fears, and distress. Your description of those persons who are trying to reconcile the service of God and the service of the world, seems to apply to me so exactly, that I cannot help acknowledging it. And yet—perhaps it is only because I am unwilling to see it so, but in some things I hope it does not quite apply to me. At least I am not conscious, when I pray for spiritual blessings, that I desire other things more. On the contrary, it always seems to me while I am praying—I mean when I *really* pray, and do not merely repeat words—as if I desired grace to serve God and to keep from sin, more than

any thing else in the world. And what surprises me above all things, is, that there is so great a difference between my prayers and my life; and that the feelings I have in prayer never last. If I seem to desire holiness with all my heart, while I am praying, and am ready to give up every thing else for it, yet when I go out into the world again, I pursue other things with as much eagerness as before, and hardly once think of being holy.

I cannot bear to think of being such a miserable sort of half-way Christian, as you describe, and yet, when I consider how little my prayers and resolutions influence my life, I am afraid to hope for any thing better. I would give almost any thing to see you now, dear father, instead of having to wait for a letter. I feel a weight upon me which it seems as if you could remove.

LETTER XVII.

MY DEAR CHILD,

I COULD not remove the weight of which you speak, if I were with you. You need a far better physician than I am, and, blessed be God, you have one. To him you must apply.

Perhaps what I am going to say will increase your burden, instead of lessening it. But my object must not be to give you present comfort, so much as to administer the counsel you need, even if it should cause temporary distress.

You say that you are not conscious of any reservation, when you pray for holiness, and that it seems to you, you desire it above all things else. Perhaps it is only for want of searching deep enough, that you have not discovered this secret holding back in your heart. There are two ways in which we judge of a person's desires and feelings;—one is by his

words, and another by his actions. If these two contradict each other, we always prefer the testimony of the latter; especially if there is any motive for representing the feelings to be other than they are. A man who treated his child with neglect and cruelty, would try in vain to persuade you that he loved him. And so of other cases, which will readily occur to you.

Now, if you go and tell God in words that you desire the gift of his Spirit above all things, and then absolutely contradict this language by your conduct, can you expect God to believe your prayers?

For consider what conduct would be consistent with such prayers. If you really prefer the grace of God and his presence to every other blessing, then you will avoid those things which prove occasions of temptation to you. That dress, or that companion, or that book, or that employment, which you know or strongly suspect will lead you into sin, will be laid aside? You will sacrifice other things for the attainment of this. You will give up your *time;* taking it from vain or useless pursuits to spend it in prayer and the study of

the Bible. You will give up your *ease*, whenever the performance of duty requires it. You will place your *thoughts* upon it, instead of forming schemes for being great, or rich, or happy in this world.

To be still more particular; one of the sins you pray against is pride. Now there is an easy way of determining whether you offer this petition sincerely, and really *wish* to be humble. Do you seek, or do you avoid those things which minister to pride? If there is an occasion or a way in which you may obtain praise, do you embrace it, or shun it? When you meet with mortifications, neglect, or contradiction, do you bear them patiently, and even welcome them as means of humbling you? or do you repine at, and grieve over them?

These are hard questions, perhaps you will say. They are so, but they are not harder than the rules of the Gospel. We must try ourselves by a high standard, if we would reach a high aim. If you find that these questions condemn you, do not be discouraged, but look to the Strong One for help, and fight on.

REPLY TO LETTER XVII.

MY DEAR FATHER,

Now I am indeed in despair. If I am not sincere in my prayers for holiness, when I seem to myself to be so, then I can have no security of any thing about myself. If I am so deceived in one particular, I may be in all others. I have no reason to hope that I ever loved God, or repented, or believed in Christ, if I cannot trust my own consciousness at all.

Besides, every Christian *does* desire holiness, and if I do not desire it, then I cannot be one. I cannot pray, for the thought that I am not sincere drives me away, and fills me with despair.

LETTER XVIII.

MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

I REPLY to your letter immediately, because I find that you have not fully apprehended my meaning, and am fearful the mistake will do you harm. I did not mean to deny that there is a certain kind, or perhaps I should say a certain degree of sincerity, in the prayers of the class of Christians I was describing, or, if you please, in your prayers. A desire may be sincere, without being the predominant desire of the soul. I have no doubt that you really *desire* holiness, but whether you desire it above all other things, is another question. It seems to you that you do, while you are praying; and probably, *for that time*, the desire for holiness is uppermost in your mind. But it cannot be prevailingly and uniformly the predominant desire with you, as is evident from what I wrote in my last letter, and from the fact that your desire is not granted. For where the de-

sire for holiness is the predominant one, God will not fail to grant it.

Perhaps the matter may be made clearer to you, by considering the distinction as one between desire and choice. Every man has many desires, which are often at variance with each other, that is, one of which must be sacrificed for the attainment of another. If a man will be rich, at all hazards, he must sacrifice leisure, ease, and present enjoyment, *certainly;* and perhaps, also, health, reputation, and conscience. If he sacrifices these for wealth, that is his *choice;* the other things he desires, but finding he cannot have them and wealth too, he gives them up.

Now, are you conscious, not only of *desiring* holiness, but of *choosing* it, in preference to everything else, and with all the sacrifices which may be necessary to attain it? If so, you will certainly have it. I promise it to you in the name of Him who cannot lie, and who has said, "If thou seek him, he will be found of thee."

But if, on self-examination, you find that you have not such a desire for holiness as this, what should be the effect? To discourage you

and make you cease praying. By no means, but just the reverse. Express what desires you have, and that is the way to increase them. Seek to cherish such desires, and to avoid what will banish them. And if you wish to have the temper of your soul so changed, that the desire for holiness should be as constant and fervent as it is now feeble and intermittent, then pray for this; and remember that Christ will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.

REPLY TO LETTER XVIII.

MY DEAR FATHER,

I AM much obliged to you for writing so soon, in order to relieve my distress. I had, however, obtained a little comfort before your letter came, in this way. While thinking of my miserable condition, and feeling myself shut out from all hope, something seemed to say to me, Well, what if you are *not* a Christian? you are in God's hands, and are you not willing to be there? Instantly, peace came into my soul. I saw that God would do with

me only what was right, and I was willing that he should do as he pleased. Indeed, I had such a view of the sovereignty of God, and of his glory, that I did not think much of myself, and was only conscious of a feeling of tranquillity and joy in remembering that *God reigned;* that he was, and always would be, infinitely glorious and happy, and that I was his creature.

I understand perfectly the distinction between desire and choice, and see the truth of it in reference to myself. I need not wonder any longer why my prayers are not answered, when my actions cry out so much louder against them. Still, I feel a difficulty. In order to pray aright, we must act aright; and in order to act aright, we must pray aright, and where are we to begin? The very reason why I need to pray for divine strength, is because I have not strength of myself to do right; and yet you say that my *prayers* cannot be sincere unless my conduct corresponds with them. It seems to me that if I could act in regard to pride, for instance, in the manner you described, it would show that I was free

from pride already, and had no more need to pray against it. Will you explain this to me, dear father? And now I must stop, for it is school-time.

LETTER XIX.

MY DEAR CHILD,

PERHAPS you are right in thinking that to act as I have described, in the case of pride, would imply, at least to a considerable extent, freedom from pride. But this is the only way to obtain freedom from any sinful propensity; to mortify it, and not allow it to break out into act. Nothing can live without food, and pride may be starved out, as well as any thing else. Nor does it require one to be free from pride, in order to begin to act in this way; for the will can control the outward actions, and we can force ourselves to remain at a distance from the place and occasion where vanity will be fed. The struggle may be a severe one, it is true, and pride may clamor loudly for gratification; but if it is resolutely denied, it will be less clamorous the next time, and by repeated denials will be wholly overcome.

The question may be respecting the purchase of a certain article of dress. Conscience whispers, "It is not needed," vanity suggests, "How it will become you." Now have you not *power*, in such a case, to obey conscience, and mortify vanity?

Or perhaps the temptation is of a different nature. You have a few leisure moments in your own room. Conscience, or the Spirit of God, whispers, "Spend them in prayer." But your heart is reluctant; there is a new magazine, or an amusing book on the table; and you would much prefer looking over its pages. If you yield to this preference, can you sincerely say that you desire spiritual blessings above every thing else?

Another thing. Even if you could act in the way I have described, in relation to pride, it would not prove that you had no need to pray against it. You will *never* attain such a freedom from pride or any other sinful passion, that you will be independent of the grace of God. It is only by living in him, and *while* you live in him that you can be free; and therefore you will have constant need of prayer.

As to professions of willingness to make this or that sacrifice, if it were necessary, or in general to do any thing that may be necessary for the attainment of holiness, we never can *know* that we are sincere in such professions, until we really make the sacrifices. Many persons make such professions, but when the time comes for trying their sincerity, that is, when temptation presents itself, they yield; they make the cause of Christ give way to the gratification of their carnal appetites, and then wish they had as much grace as brother A., who always goes straight forward and does his duty.

Such are some of the pretexts and excuses of a treacherous heart. Let them not deceive you, but bring them out clearly into the light, that they may be seen and abandoned. Aim at absolute conformity to the law of God, and you will certainly make some progress.

REPLY TO LETTER XIX.

MY DEAR FATHER,

I HOPE your letter will do me good, and that I shall begin to strive against sin, as well as pray against it. I believe I have always had a feeling that when I had prayed for grace, my part was done, and it was for God to do the rest. I see now that it is necessary to watch and fight as well as pray.

But there are still thoughts which oppress and discourage me. I have been reflecting more on those deficiences of natural character, which exist among different persons, and which seem to me to make the duties of religion so much easier for some than for others. You know I wrote about E. S. Since then she has got over her doubts, and her mind seems to be entirely settled. Every day I am struck with the difference between her and me. She is not liable to any of those changes of feeling which affect me so much. She is equable and uniform in every thing; not easily excited, and not soon discouraged. She goes on just the same, day after day, while I am

perpetually agitated and tossed about like a wave of the sea.

She has, too, a great deal more decision than I have. When she has once resolved on a thing she always does it, and seems to do it without effort.

How different is it with me! My feelings, and the resolutions which grow out of them, are subject to perpetual fluctuations. Whatever I may feel, or think, or purpose to-day, I cannot be sure that the effect will abide with me till to-morrow. I am also so prone to despond and to be discouraged by difficulties; and this despondency takes away all strength for effort. All these things are true of me, as you know, dear father, not in my religious character only, but in whatever I undertake.

There is one verse in the Bible which seems to have been written on purpose for me, and I can almost hear the voice of God addressing it to me. It is this: "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." I can never hope for anything more than to be one of the lowest sort of Christians, and to get through the world with doing as little harm as possible.

LETTER XX.

MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

I SHALL begin my letter with a question which may seem to you quite foreign to the subject of yours; but it is not so. The question is, What is the state of your health now? Is it as good as usual?

And my reason for asking the question is, that I think I perceive, in your last letter, indications, not only of the despondency which is nearly habitual with you, but of a still farther degree of it, such as is often produced by ill health. The mind is very much affected by the body, and if your physical health is suffering, that must be established before I can minister to your mind with any hope of success. * * * * If my conjecture is right, argument is not what you need; however, I will give you some thoughts which may be of service.

It is true that you have temptations and tri-

als which are peculiar to you, or to persons of your temperament; but it does not thence follow that these are *greater* than those of any other person. They may appear so to you, but that is because you do not know, and never can know, by experience, what are the temptations of persons differently constituted. Each temperament has its peculiar disadvantages, and also its peculiar advantages—one being set off against the other. If you have some difficulties which others have not, others have some which you have not. And they, perhaps, are equally ready to think theirs the greatest.

In the second place, your Redeemer is fully aware of all these unfavourable peculiarities of which you complain, and has undertaken to save you in spite of them. He does not offer to redeem those only who have a certain cast of natural character, and who are free from certain natural impediments; his invitations are to all; his promises are to all.

And finally, if it be true, as you suppose, that the difficulties in your way are greater than those in the way of most persons, or even of any other person, then your reward will

be the greater if you overcome them. Christ knows our frames; he understands the precise nature and amount of every obstacle we surmount; he notes every struggle, and counts every prayer;—not one shall go unrewarded. If you have more to contend with, then contend the more earnestly. If you have peculiar difficulties, use peculiar diligence. The prize is worth a struggle. Heaven is worth all the effort you can put forth; do not fear to be too strenuous in seeking it.

LETTER XXI.

MY DEAR FATHER,

I BEGAN this term with very strong resolutions to live a more holy life than I did the last six months, and especially not to become so much engrossed in my studies. But there are some cases in which I do not certainly know what is right and what is wrong. You know the Bible does not give us any exact rules about little things, only general directions. There are a great many instances in which I am doubtful what to do. Many of them relate to the employment of time. I do not know how much time I may lawfully and properly give to study.

Then there is some time, though very little, after I have learned my lessons, and there are a great many books in the house I should like to read. Besides, I want to spend some time with the other girls, and sometimes they come to see me in my room. But if I do any of

these things, I sometimes think it is wrong, and that I ought to spend all the time, not necessarily occupied in my studies, in prayer or reading the Bible. How can I know what I ought to do?

REPLY TO LETTER XXI

MY DEAR MARIA,

THE questions you ask are such as it is very difficult for one person to answer for another. They cannot be answered properly, in detail, without a minute acquaintance with the circumstances, character, trials, and temptations of the person who asks them;—such an acquaintance as one person seldom has with another. On the other hand, they are *not* very difficult to be answered by the individual himself, provided only that his eye is single. A simple regard to the glory of God, without any admixture of selfish motives, will ordinarily prevent all embarrassing doubts, and make the path of duty clear as the noon-day. For what our Saviour has said of the *doctrines* of religion, applies with equal force to its *duties*. If any

man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.

A simple illustration will show you how this singleness of aim operates in dispelling doubts and difficulties. Suppose a father about to undertake a journey, leaves two children without any exact rules as to the employment of each hour, but with general instructions to perform certain duties, and avoid certain faults. One of these children loves his father with a love so intense and engrossing, that it is the mainspring of all his conduct, and without any effort on his part, regulates every word and action. He is not troubled with the question, "*Must* I spend this hour for my father, or *may* I, without displeasing him, spend it for myself?—for it is his wish, his choice, to spend *every* hour for his father. As his duty and inclination point the same way, there is no conflict between them, and no doubt as to the course they indicate.

The other child, on the contrary, though not destitute of affection for his father, has a great many selfish desires, plans, and pursuits, which he is unwilling to abandon; and his constant

effort is to reconcile these pursuits with obedience to his father's wishes. He is continually in doubt whether he may not *lawfully* pursue this or that object of desire; and whether, by gratifying himself in this or that instance, he may not be fulfilling his father's wishes. But it is easy to see that all these doubts spring from his double-mindedness, which makes him "unstable in all his ways."

Perhaps you will say that my illustration does not hold good in one particular, since we, as beings possessing a corporeal nature, have necessities which must be attended to, and cannot, therefore, if we would, spend *all* our time in the service of God. But this objection arises from a mistaken notion as to what *is* serving God. We are as really serving him, when we are taking that food, or rest, or recreation, which is necessary for the refreshment of body or mind—provided we are actuated in all we do by a supreme love to God—as when we are engaged in any religious duty. And you are as really serving him when you are pursuing your studies, or attending to your health, if your motives are right, as when you are praying or reading the Bible. In fact, most persons

are so circumstanced, that comparatively but a small part of their time can be spent in devotional duties. If, therefore, we could not grow in grace, or do the will of God, except while engaged in such duties, we should make but little progress indeed. But it is possible to *eat and drink* to the glory of God; it is possible to be "diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

But you will perhaps say, "All this does not help me out of my difficulties in the least. I know that if I *had* right feelings, it would be easy always to act right. But not having them, or having many wrong ones mixed with them, I wish to know how to make my conduct right, hoping thus to attain right feelings."

And this, I acknowledge, is a very important question, and one which a person sanctified but in part may sincerely ask. Nay, it is one which, at some stage of progress, and in relation to some point or other, all Christians *must* ask. I will therefore do what I can towards helping you to answer it; but not to-day, for my time and paper are both exhausted. It is necessary, however, if you would obtain any benefit from the answer, that you should

have a sincere purpose of obedience, so far as duty shall be made plain to you, and that your wish should be to know *exactly* what you *ought* to do, not what you *may* do, and yet be a Christian.

MY DEAR CHILD,

I PROMISED to give you some rules by the aid of which you may determine what is right and what is wrong, in those cases of daily occurrence which are generally regarded as trifles. And, 1. Whenever you are doubtful as to the propriety or expediency of a certain indulgence, and there is nothing but inclination to plead for it, the safest course is to relinquish it. The only evil that can possibly result from so doing, is the slight, present pain of self-denial; if it deserves to be called an evil. At all events, it is not to be weighed for a moment against the risk of doing wrong, of wounding your conscience, even in the least, or of grieving the Spirit. True, it may be somewhat difficult, at first, to observe this rule, but the difficulty will grow less as you advance, and you will thus form an invaluable habit—

that of listening to the voice of conscience before inclination is allowed to speak.

But, 2. There are cases of much more difficulty than these, in which not inclination alone pleads to be gratified, but even duty requires that inclination be gratified to a certain extent; and the difficulty is to determine what that extent is. To make my meaning plainer, I will take one of the cases you have supposed. I will suppose that you have some moments of leisure in your own room, when no immediate duty presses upon you, and inclination urges you to devote them to an entertaining book, which lies on the table. On the other hand, something suggests to you that you might spend them in reading the Bible, or in prayer. Now, if you are not at that time in need of relaxation or refreshment, if neither mind or body is overtasked, there is certainly nothing but inclination to plead for the indulgence; and you will no doubt reap the reward of your self-denial, if you devote the time to the Bible. If you were in the right frame of mind, this would not be an act of self-denial, but of choice, as I remarked in the previous letter.

But if you have already been spending time in study or meditation, so that your mind is wearied, and you feel the need of relaxation, then you may lawfully and properly seek it in the book on your table—supposing it of course to be one of a suitable character for a Christian to read.

3. If you still find the question difficult of decision, in the presence of temptation, then decide when temptation is absent. Re-consider the matter, as you lie down to rest, when conscience has liberty to speak alone; and whatever may be her decision then, remember to abide by it when temptation returns. Be sure that whatever looks wrong to you *afterwards*, when the blinding effect of temptation is removed, *is* wrong, and must be abandoned.

4. Whatever unfits you for communion with God, and gives you a distaste for spiritual employments, is wrong. This is true of books, company, dress, and occupations. Henry Martyn made it a rule to abandon any book or study which he could not lay aside with pleasure, to take up the Bible. Things innocent in themselves may become snares to us, by absorbing too much of our time and affec-

tions. The Apostle charges us not only to lay aside every sin, but every *weight;* every thing which may encumber and impede us in our Christian course.

Finally, if your doubts of the propriety of any course are very strong, and constantly recurring, this fact alone is a sufficient reason for abandoning that course. It almost certainly proves it to be a wrong one. "He that doubteth," says Paul, "is damned if he eat." Even if the thing be not wrong in itself, his doubts make it wrong for him. And no Christian can run with speed and success the race set before him, while he is harassed by a cloud of doubts and fears as to whether he is running aright. A tender conscience is an invaluable blessing; and it is worth much self-denial and sacrifice to attain it. Better deny yourself unnecessarily ten times than once sin against conscience.

I trust these hints will be of service to you, and that you will become grounded and settled in the right way, steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

LETTER XXII.

MY DEAR FATHER,

I THINK your directions have been of use to me already, and that God has blessed me in the first attempt to observe them. They have, at least, made me more watchful over my conduct, and I am astonished to find how much I have been in the habit of yielding to small temptations, and how difficult it is now to resist them. I was conscious of repeated struggles between inclination and duty, and fancied that conscience gained the victory, at least as often as inclination. But I see now, on looking back, and trying myself by your rules, that it was not so. In almost every instance, I yielded to the temptation, satisfying myself by saying that it was only *for once*, and a mere trifle; that next time I would do differently, but that in this particular case I must be gratified.

Yet, in spite of all this, I had a sort of notion

that I was uncommonly watchful against little sins, and that I was more conscientious in small matters than many other Christians; for no other reason than because on each of these occasions, there was a struggle between conscience and inclination, and I remembered the struggle without remembering the result. I thought I was better for these warnings of conscience, instead of seeing that they only increased my guilt, so long as I did not obey them.

But I hope God has given me a fixed purpose, to lay aside every thing that keeps me back in the Christian course. Indeed, since the first struggle, I find it easier to give up all selfish indulgences, than to keep some of them, and yet, not bestow too much time on them. You know I have always found my strongest temptations, to come from amusing and exciting books. The girls here read them, and I have indulged myself sometimes in that way. But I have now taken all such books out of my room, and do not mean to let another come in. But I am afraid I never shall have such a spirit as Martyn had, or love the Bible as he did.

REPLY TO LETTER XXII.

MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

You have incidentally touched, in your last letter, on another of the "strange things" in Christian experience; viz. that the mere detection and discovery of some hidden sin, even if it be neither repented of nor forsaken, is a cause for self-gratulation and self-complacency. This tendency is very obvious in the experience of the awakened sinner. He trusts in his convictions, in his clear discoveries of his own sinfulness, and in the views which God gives him of his depravity. Instead of feeling that the degree of light in his understanding, but aggravates his guilt in refusing to walk by the light, he takes credit to himself for it, and seems to imagine that his guilt, in the sight of God, is diminished thereby.

After he becomes a Christian, the same error is repeated. Whenever the Holy Spirit makes to him a new discovery of his sinfulness, he regards it as an evidence of his quick-sightedness to his own defects, and of the ten-

derness of his conscience. In this way, he is proud of the detection, rather than humbled for the sin. This is an error to be very carefully guarded against. Sin detected, is not the less sin; and if persisted in after the detection, is aggravated sin. Besides, nothing has so great a tendency to sear the conscience and harden the heart, as to continue in the practice of known sin, even in ever so slight a matter.

I am glad you have begun to feel the importance of being strictly conscientious in little things. This is the only way of being so in great things; for "he that is unfaithful in that which is least, is unfaithful, also, in much." How many souls have been ruined by these two suggestions: "It is but a little thing;" and "*It is but for once.*" Never do that *for once*, which you are not willing to do always; and never do that in a matter of small moment, which you would not do in the greatest concern of life.

LETTER XXIII.

MY DEAR FATHER,

I do not know what to think of the state I am in now. It is different from any thing I have ever known before. All temptations seem to be removed, and I have no trouble or difficulty of any kind. My mind is in a calm and peaceful state, and thoughts of God and of heavenly things, spring up of themselves, wherever I am, or however I am engaged. At these times, my eyes fill with tears, and my heart seems to long for a place in which to pour itself out before God. I fancy that as soon as I get into my own room, I shall wish to do nothing but pray and praise.

But now comes the strange part of the matter. As soon as I *am* alone, the desire to pray vanishes. I have spent no more time in prayer, nor have I prayed with more fervour during these few days, when God has seemed so near to me, than at any other time. I am afraid

there is a sort of indolent feeling of security at the bottom; for when I try to rouse myself to improve the favourable moment, and to lay hold of the blessing while it is offered,—I cannot do it. I do not seem to feel the *need* of prayer, and though I try to alarm myself, by thinking that all this peace and joy may be gone to-morrow, and that I ought to take advantage of it while it lasts, it avails nothing. Besides, it is suggested to me, on the other hand, that while God grants me comforts, I ought to enjoy them, and not to disquiet myself unnecessarily with doubts and anxieties.

But how delightful it would be to go on so all the time, and never have any of these terrible conflicts and distresses. Nothing seems to me so mysterious, as God's dealings with Christians in this respect. How much more they would honour him, if they had more grace, and were not left under the power of sin as they are! And if there would be danger of their being proud, on that account, then God could easily give them more grace, to keep them from being proud. Thus they might continue to go forward all the time, instead of stopping and going back, as they often

do; and then wicked men would see the beauty of religion, and be attracted by it.—I do not mean that I suppose I know better than God, what is right to do. Of course, he knows and does what is best; but I wish I could understand why it is best. However, perhaps even this is wrong. If you think it is, dear father, I will try not to wish so. And this would be very easy, if I were all the time as free from trouble as I am now.

REPLY TO LETTER XXIII.

MY DEAR MARIA,

You have yourself furnished, in one part of your letter, an answer to the question contained in the other part. In the state in which you are at present, you say you find it difficult to realize your *need* of prayer. All temptations being removed, or weakened, and the grace of God constantly present with you, there is a tendency to rest in these blessings; to imagine that they will continue, and to become secure and careless. This is the natural effect of the removal of temptation, and the en-

joyment of spiritual aid and consolation. How is it, on the contrary, when the soul is beset by enemies; hard pressed by temptations; bowed down under a load of sins and sorrows? Then she cries unto God in her distresses; her language is, "Bow down thine ear, hear me, speedily; let my cry come before thee, even into thine ears."

This, then, is reason enough, why we should not be delivered, at once and perfectly, from the power of sin and temptations. God stands ready to give us as much grace as we can receive without abusing it; that is, as much as we will give him the glory for, and as much as we can bear without being made secure and self-confident by it. You say that he might give us *more* grace, to keep us from abusing what he has already given, but this is not God's way of dealing with his people. He does not carry on his work in their hearts by a series of miracles, but he acts in conformity with the laws, according to which human nature is constituted. If He designs to produce humility in us, he does it by placing us in circumstances and situations adapted to humble us; and then, in connec-

tion with these circumstances, imparting the influences of his Spirit. Whether he might do otherwise, is a question with which we have nothing to do, and which we have no right to ask. This is God's way—it is, therefore the best.

Now prayer is the appointed means of obtaining all spiritual blessings. Any thing which drives us to pray, is, therefore, a blessing; no matter how grievous it may be for the present. Any temptation or sorrow, any discovery of our own hearts, which makes us pray more frequently and more urgently, is a favour to be thankful for. God has been trying you, to see whether you would be led to pray more frequently and earnestly, by bestowing upon you certain aids and graces. According to your own confession, they have not had this effect. On the contrary, you began to feel as if they would continue forever, without any trouble on your part; and probably, if they should be continued still longer, you would grow still more secure, and your prayers would become less fervent.

Indeed, prayer means a good deal more than we are apt to think. The whole soul must be

in it, or it is nothing. It must be an agony, a wrestling, or it is worth little. Better to climb the Hill Difficulty, or walk in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, if then only we can learn to agonize in prayer.

Another reason which we can see why God does not deliver his people, in a moment, from sins and temptations, and conflicts, is that they may learn their own vileness, weakness and wretchedness, more fully, and consequently prize and adore more highly, the delivering grace of God. How could we rightly esteem the physician, without being first sensible of the dreadfulness of the disease? How could we sufficiently love and praise the Redeemer, if we had not first felt how galling and how adamantine were the fetters of our slavery? How could we realize to its extent the sweetness of the cup of joy which we shall drink hereafter, without first tasting the gall and wormwood mingled for us by sin?

And on the contrary, how will our experience here prepare us for the bliss laid up for us hereafter? How will our present conflicts and trials enable us to appreciate the value of our redemption, and the love of our Re-

deemer? With what transport shall we exchange the fears, and doubts, and griefs, and sins, and warfares of this life for the rest, the love, the joy, the holiness of heaven!

Something, then, we can understand of God's reasons for leaving his people in part a a prey to temptations and conflicts. Undoubtedly there are other reasons which we do not understand, and let us be careful to exercise that simple, child-like faith, which is the only proper attitude of our minds on such subjects. We sometimes deceive ourselves by saying, of course God knows what is best, when in reality, we are distrusting his love or wisdom, and the very wish, the *impatient* wish to understand the reasons of God's conduct, proves that we are thus deceiving ourselves. Perhaps your wish was of this kind.

There is an implication in all such wishes that we desire to be holy, more earnestly than God desires that we should be so. In fact, there is often a great deal of sin mingled with our desires for holiness. At the bottom of many of them, we shall find indolence—a weariness of the struggles, and watchfulness, and self-

denial that are rendered necessary by our sinfulness. It would be so pleasant to find right desires and feelings springing up spontaneously in our hearts, and giving birth to right words and actions without any effort! But this is what we shall not find in this world, whatever may be our attainments; the effort necessary to keep our worldly and grovelling hearts fixed on Christ must be made, or nothing can be done. Do not be weary, then, of labour and effort, but rather labour *earnestly* to enter into that rest.

LETTER XXIV.

MY DEAR FATHER,

It is all darkness again in my soul, and I am afraid through my own fault. All those gracious aids and consolations which were granted me for a while, are withdrawn, and sin has resumed its power. I wonder at myself, inexpressibly, that while the favourable season lasted, I did not improve it. But the withdrawal of God's presence does not seem to have the effect you thought it would, of leading me to pray more fervently. Indeed, I can do nothing but groan and sigh. The burden of sin never seemed so heavy, or my weakness so great.

Still, I find some relief in prayer, or rather in lying at God's feet, and sighing out my complaints before him. I do not wish for any other comfort but that which arises from his presence, and it seems better to desire and seek after him, even unsuccessfully, than to obtain everything

this world can give. I see that there was, as you have pointed out to me, a great deal of selfish impatience in my desire to be freed from sin. I was tired of watching and fighting. But now I feel willing to watch and to fight; and all I fear is being left to be satisfied with anything short of perfect conformity to the will of God. Two verses in the Psalms have been much in my mind this morning, and seem to express my feelings. One is, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." The other, "Trust in the Lord, and *wait patiently* for him."

REPLY TO LETTER XXIV.

MY DEAR MARIA,

I THINK it very probable that there may be more of what really constitutes prayer, in the groans and sighs you offer to God now, when you say you cannot pray, than at some other times, when you have found abundance of words at command, and perhaps supposed that you prayed very fervently. God looks at the heart; fluency of expression and animal excitement are not what he desires; but he is

well satisfied to recognise, in the depths of the soul, a longing after him, accompanied with a patient, submissive waiting for him; a spirit of self-renunciation, and a desire that he should be all in all. This quiet waiting is very different from the slothful waiting of those who sit still, fold their hands, and say they must "wait God's time." It is the waiting of earnest desire, chastened by a sense of unworthiness, and mingled with hope and trust. It is a grace in which young Christians are often deficient; for it is the fruit of repeated disappointments, of an acquaintance with our own unworthiness and ill desert, and of frequent experiences of the love and tender mercy of God. It was this spirit which led David to exclaim, "Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned; my soul is even as a weaned child;" and which prompted the resolution, "I will be still, and not open my mouth any more, since he is pacified towards me for all that I have done."

You need never fear that this submissive temper is carried too far, or rather that it is of the wrong kind, so long as it does not serve as an excuse for slothfulness. It is consistent

with the most persevering and vigorous effort; nay, this is its natural fruit, but it may be abused, by being made a pretext for inactivity. In this case it is certainly wrong. This is not waiting *on the Lord.* It is not a watching for him "more than they that watch for the morning;" it is not a "digging for wisdom as for hid treasures," nor a panting for God "as the hart panteth for the water brooks." The utmost vehemence of desire may exist, but it is prevented from becoming impatient, by an assured, confident reliance on the love, wisdom, and faithfulness of God. Cultivate this temper, my dear child, if you would grow in grace.

LETTER XXV.

MY DEAR FATHER,

God has been showing me my sins, one at a time, in such a light as I never saw them before. First, I had a view of the *pride* of my heart, far clearer than I had ever had, though I thought I had seen enough of it. Oh, how hateful, how detestable it looked! How strange, how inconceivably strange it seemed, that such a loathsome, ignorant, miserable wretch could have found anything to be proud of; and how wonderful that God could have beheld such arrogance, self-sufficiency, and haughtiness, without smiting me into the dust! I had never so longed for exaltation and advancement, as I now longed to be abased in the dust; to lie there forever, below all other creatures.

Then, all at once, a similar view of my selfishness broke in upon me. I saw how I had always sought my own happiness first, and how little I had cared for the glory of God,

though it was really the only thing worth caring for in the universe; and this sin, which had sometimes looked so trifling, now swelled up into an enormous size, and looked so black and hateful, that I almost expected the earth to open and swallow me up. After this, all my other sinful qualities and actions, one after another, were shown to me in the same way. It seemed as if God opened one chamber in my soul after another, and made me look in and see the abominations hidden there. And yet I felt, all the time, that I saw but a very small part of what God saw there; and I longed to see more, even while the sight overwhelmed me, rather than to be deceived, and think better of myself than I deserved.

The hope of ever freeing myself from these sins, by any effort, seems to me perfectly absurd. They form the very essence of my own character, and are so absolutely a part of me, especially selfishness, which is the root and ground of all the others, that it seems as if I should cease to be myself, if this were destroyed. The sins which have appeared to me the worst before, in fact, all outward manifestations of sin, are nothing, com-

pared with this fountain of pollution within. The work of purifying such a fountain looks infinite, and the redemption of one soul seems far greater and more wonderful, than that of creating a world. I cannot help crying to God, for these sins appear so odious, that the thought of being left under their power forever, is intolerable. But it is the cry of despair, rather than of hope; for though I know that all things are possible with God, yet it is hard to believe that my deliverance from sin is possible. Yet, to live without hope—O, my dear father, you cannot conceive what a miserable situation I am in. If for a moment I gather strength to lift up a prayer, the next moment another wave washes over me, and I sink in the deep waters.

REPLY TO LETTER XXV.

MY DEAR CHILD,

I SYMPATHISE with you, my dear daughter, in your present distress, while I cannot but rejoice that God is teaching you so much of your own sinfulness. Such experiences are

indeed, for the present, not joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward they work out the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby. Bitter as death are such discoveries to the heavy-laden soul, but they are mercies which should be gratefully acknowledged. I will suggest some thoughts which may, by the blessing of God, sustain and support you in these distresses.

And in the first place, these sins are not, as you yourself perceive, a new growth in your heart; they are as old as your being, forming, as you say, a part of yourself. You have always been a captive to your lusts, but formerly the bondage was a voluntary one, and you were unconscious of your chains. Should you not be grateful to that Being who has opened your eyes, who has taught you to perceive the slavery in which you were held, and to cry for deliverance—having first provided a way of deliverance for you? These sins are not new to God, though they are new to you; he has always seen them in your heart. And though you have been conscious of them, only when some temptation had called them out into action, God has seen them in the

depths of your soul, from the commencement of your rational being. You are no worse, in his sight, when temptation has brought them to light, or when his Spirit has spread them before you, than you were before; neither are you any better, when your corruptions slumber, and you yourself are ignorant of their power.

Since, then, you are always the same in the sight of God, and since it is only by your seeing yourself as he sees you, that genuine humility can be wrought in your soul, how grateful ought you to be for every fresh discovery of your sinfulness! Instead of inferring from it that you are not a child of God, it furnishes a ground of hope that you are one; for why, unless this is the case, should God take any pains to convince or humble you. There can be no stronger evidence that a person is in the school of Christ, than his learning the lessons which Christ teaches; and the first of these is, as I have told you before, a knowledge of, and distrust of ourselves.

Another comforting consideration is that sin cannot hurt those who constantly resist and

strive against it. Only when it is listened to, parleyed with, indulged, does it become dangerous. Those who, uncompromisingly, universally and constantly battle with it, shall find that the heavenly armour with which they are clothed is of proof, and able to defend them against all the fiery darts of sin and Satan. Only keep your *will* right, only do not tamper with sin, do not dally with it in secret, do not admit it even into your thoughts, and it shall not harm you.

And finally, there is one point of view in which we may be almost content to see ourselves poor and miserable, and blind and naked, and in need of all things; for the more helpless and undone we are, the more will the grace of Christ be magnified in our redemption. "Most gladly, therefore," says Paul, "will I glory even in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." If the late experiences or discoveries you have had of your own heart, produce such a frame of mind as this, you will indeed have reason to rejoice in them. "What matter, though I am a poor, helpless, guilty sinner," you will then be ready to exclaim, "Christ is my Saviour;

what matter though I am ignorant, he is wise; what matter though I am vile, he is holy; what matter though I am weak, he is strong. He is my wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. He is the vine of which I am a branch; and therefore I shall be nourished from his fulness, and live by his life. Gladly will I be nothing, since Christ is all in all." I have more to say, but must leave it until another time.

LETTER XXVI.

MY DEAR MARIA,

One frequent cause of the low and languishing condition of Christians, is allowing unrepented sin to rest upon the soul. "So long," says Fuller, "as sin remains upon the conscience unlamented, it is like poison in the constitution: it will be certain to operate, and that, in a way that shall go on more and more to kill all holy resolution, to harden the heart, and to defile the imaginations and desires." In fact, sin, unrepented of, is sin indulged; and the hardening and searing influence of allowed sin, is unspeakably dreadful. On some accounts it evinces greater depravity not to repent of sin than to commit it at first; for a man may be hurried into an act by the pressure of sudden temptation, from which at another time his whole soul would revolt. But if on cool reflection he feels no sorrow, and can deliberately survey his conduct with-

out compunction, it argues the greatest obduracy.

But you may be inclined to think that no child of God could ever be guilty of such conduct and feelings; and indeed one of the most striking features of the renewed heart is penitence. Yet real Christians, there is reason to believe, do fall into this habit almost unconsciously, with respect to some sins. These are generally what they regard as small sins, or such as, by natural constitution, or surrounding circumstances, they are most prone to. A Christian, for instance, who has an irritable temper, which has never been fully brought under the influence of renewing grace, has become so accustomed to failures in this particular, that he is little concerned about them. He has rather established it in his mind as a settled point, that he always was, and always shall be too quick-tempered—it is natural to him—and God will not expect him to be perfect in that respect. Instead, therefore, of heartily repenting of each instance of transgression, and applying to the blood of Christ for cleansing, he suffers a long account to run up against him almost unno-

ticed. When reviewing the sins of the day, these faults of temper excite no attention; or if they are slightly mentioned, it is without any true and deep repentance.

Now, I do not say that a Christian in this situation will be entirely shut out from God's favour, and receive no spiritual blessings at all; but his enjoyment and his progress will be very greatly hindered by it. His conscience becomes less tender on other points from having been silenced on one, and the Holy Spirit is, in a great measure, if not wholly, grieved away. As the spirit of *holiness*, He must withdraw from the soul where sin is harboured and cherished. Or if He visits such a soul at all, it is as a reprover, and where this is the case, so that the sin is brought out into more distinct consciousness, while yet it is not forsaken, there is an end to all comfort. Here is the source of a great deal of the unbelief and despondency of Christians. The consciousness of sin, hid in the heart, begets such a distrust of God's love as nothing can remove; and all the promises of the Bible may be applied in vain: just as a child, who has committed a secret fault, shuns

its parent's eye, avoids his presence, and receives no pleasure even from expressions of affection,—so is it with the child of God, who is living in the practice of sin. It will be in vain to exhort him to *believe;* he cannot believe; to believe in such a case is to tempt God, by believing what we have no warrant for.

Perhaps you have never looked at the subject in this light, and therefore I will dwell on the last thought a little longer. To tempt God is to put ourselves needlessly into circumstances of danger and difficulty, and then wait to see whether He will extricate us. In other words, tempting God is pretending to trust in Him for deliverance, when we are out of the way of our duty. And although it is impossible to exercise any genuine faith, except when we are in the path of duty, yet this spurious confidence may sometimes lull the soul into a dangerous security. Professors of religion who are in a state of declension, tempt God, when they neglect to repent and return to Him immediately, and encourage themselves in this course by a pretended reliance on God's faithfulness and pardoning mercy.

When the tempter sees them alarmed in view of their situation, he whispers to them, "It is true, you are not as you once were, and not as you ought to be; but it is common for the children of God to fall into a state of declension, and even to remain in it for a considerable time. You have not declined so far from the right path, as many have done who were afterwards reclaimed. And as you are a child of God, He is bound by His promises to reclaim you before you die. Moreover, till He sees fit to reclaim you, all your efforts will avail nothing. Continuing a day, or even a week longer, in your present state will make no difference. You can repent and be forgiven then, and you must repent if you return now." To these artful but false suggestions many a professing Christian listens from day to day, doing violence to his conscience, and waiting to see whether God will not save him from his backslidings. But he sins, he sins most provokingly; and if he should not be left to fall into perdition, he will probably fall in such a manner as will cause him to complain of broken bones.

Again: professors of religion tempt God

when they venture to neglect any duty, or to indulge in any sin, with the intention of repenting, and a hope of being forgiven. If we did not know what human nature is, we could hardly believe that a reasonable being would ever do anything which, at the very time of doing it, he intended to be sorry for. Yet this, we have reason to believe, is often done. When a man feels strongly tempted to indulge in some forbidden gratification, and is looking round for an excuse; when he sits as it were on the brink of sin, and looks down upon it with wishful eyes, the tempter whispers, "If thou art a child of God, cast thyself down. There is no danger; God will prevent thy fall from being fatal. Christ will pray for thee as he did for Peter, that thy faith may not fail. Thou hast only to repent, and all will be well." Thus many professors are encouraged to omit known duties, to trifle with known sins, to venture on from one sin to another. Indeed, it is wholly owing to false hopes and reasonings of this kind, that professed Christians indulge in sin. Would they sin, think you, did they not hope to repent and be forgiven? Would they throw themselves off from the safe ground of duty,

if they did not hope that God would prevent their fall? Would they cast themselves into hell, if they did not hope to be drawn out of it?

I have written a long letter, and I trust it may be of service to you. It will be so, if it increases your dread of sin.

Your affectionate father.

REPLY TO LETTER XXVI.

MY DEAR FATHER,

I THANK you sincerely for your long letter, and trust that the hope you express in the concluding part of it will be realized. I attempted to examine myself, after reading it, to see whether I was tempting God, in the sense in which you explained it. But this duty of self-examination is one which I never can perform to any profit. When I set about it, everything in my mind looks confused and indistinct, and I cannot tell what is there and what is not. Besides, while I am trying to find out, some thought leads my mind off before I know it, and in a moment I am at the ends of the earth.

Thus the time is wasted; and this has happened to me so often, that it seems hardly worth while to make any more attempts. Do tell me, dear father, why it is so hard, and what I can do to make it easy.

I think I have often experienced those temptations you describe in your letter, though there is something very frightful in such suggestions, when they are set down in black and white. The idea of sinning in order to repent and be forgiven, especially seems dreadful; it indicates so much ingratitude. But it is strange how different sin looks before and after its commission, how one may be led into it, or encouraged in it by motives so base and mean, that we should scorn them, if temptation were not present. For this reason I think, as you say, that it shows much greater depravity not to repent of sin, than to commit it at first. And I never had such a view of the guilt I contracted by remaining so many years in impenitence, as while I was thinking on this subject. Oh, how wonderful that God could bear with me! How wonderful that he still bears! Good-bye, dear father.

Your affectionate daughter.

LETTER XXVII.

MY DEAR MARIA,

I AM not surprised to learn that you find self-examination difficult. It is so, even for advanced Christians; much more for those who have made but little progress in religion, and to whom the work is new. One reason is, that persons of ill-disciplined minds cannot easily confine their thoughts to any subject, whatever it may be. The *thinking* of such persons consists in allowing their minds to run at random through the earth; roving at pleasure from one subject to another, without method or end. If you have ever traced back the course of your thoughts for an hour, perhaps you have found something like this to be the case. And if you have made an attempt to restrain these roving imaginations, and fasten your thoughts down to any profitable subject, you have probably found it extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible.

But if confining the thoughts *at all* is difficult, much more so is self-examination. Thoughts, passions, desires, and feelings, are so interwoven and blended together, and each is so linked with all, that they can hardly be separated. Then the good and the evil are blended in the same way; a great deal of evil and a very little good, mixed and confused together; so that to the beginner in self-examination, all looks like a chaos. There is something beginning in good, but running out into evil; here is a wrong motive, acting under the mask of a right one; and here again, a good and bad motive act together; as when we perform a duty partly from a desire to please God, and partly to be seen of men. Add to these things, that self-love naturally makes us unwilling to see ourselves as we are, and that Satan will oppose with all his might every effort we make for that purpose,—and we have abundance of reasons why self-examination is difficult.

But then the same observation holds good of this as of all other religious duties—that just *in proportion* as they are difficult they are necessary. The difficulty grows out of our sinfulness; and the greater it is, the more need

of a remedy. The uses of self-examination are so evident as scarcely to require a mention. Without it, we can have no assured hope of heaven, since we know not the evidence on which our hope rests. We cannot know what progress we have already made, nor can we see what remains to be done; and thus are liable to be like waves of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. Besides, it is a duty expressly enjoined in the Scriptures; and therefore to be performed, whether we find it easy or difficult.

It is a great help to regular and formal self-examination, to maintain a *constant* watch over ourselves, having one eye, as it were, turned inward, to mark what is going on there. This is what is meant by *sobriety*, in the Gospel sense; not living *at loose ends*, so to speak, but walking *circumspectly*, not as fools but as wise. This habit will make a review of the day easy, at its close; and these daily reviews will prepare the way for those more solemn and protracted examinations into our own state, which we shall wish to make at times. On the contrary, if the work be entirely neglected for a time, all will be confusion, as you represent it

to have been in your own experience; and it will be impossible to make up for this omission. How would it be possible for a merchant to keep his accounts correctly, if he examined them only once a month, or once a year, instead of keeping a *daily* reckoning? It is especially true in regard to this duty, that each effort makes the succeeding one easier. However, I would not advise you, at your present stage of progress, to sit down to this work, without any guide or help, lest the result be only a waste of time. It might be well to have a few written questions, such as you can easily prepare for yourself, by the aid of which you can fix your mind upon a single point, and bring it back again when it wanders. Mingle with your scrutiny prayer to the Spirit who is the Searcher of hearts, and persevere in the work, not long at one time, but renewing the attempt day after day,—and I can promise that your "labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."

MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

I DID not remark to you in my last letter, that the extreme difficulty you find in religious meditation, and in self examination, indicates a very worldly spirit. But so it evidently is. If the thoughts are continually running off to worldly objects, and can with difficulty be recalled from them, it certainly shows that a great part of our affections are with them. Now you may suppose that as a school-girl, you are less in danger of this sin than many other persons—those, for instance, who have entered upon the cares of active life, and are at the head of a family. But the fact is, that worldliness is so subtle and insidious an enemy, that it will creep in, any where, and in any situation, unless it is carefully guarded against; and a hermit may be as worldly minded as a monarch. There are some reasons why this sin is more blinding and deceitful in its nature than any other; so that those who are most under its power, are least aware of it. This was evidently the case with Martha, who was "cumbered about much serving." She had so little suspicion of the true nature

of her feelings and conduct, that she did not hesitate to appeal to Christ himself, evidently expecting that he would justify and approve her course. This is a very remarkable instance of the delusive and deceitful nature of this sin.

And one reason why it thus deceives the subjects of it, is that it is exceedingly unfavourable to Christian watchfulness and self-examination. While a man's attention is fixed on the external world, and his heart is full of its cares and pleasures, it is impossible that he should know much of what is going on within him. He must be ignorant of his real state, and the more completely he is under the influence of a worldly spirit, the less is he aware of its existence. Moreover, to a man under the influence ef such a spirit, worldly objects appear more valuable and important than they really are. These objects are invested with a fictitious worth, and a deceitful lustre is shed around them. Now if you ask such a man whether he is not too much engaged in worldly pursuits, he will probably assure you that he is not. And he speaks what he thinks.—For, seeing these objects through a wrong me-

dium, he thinks them to be important, and supposes that he regards them no more than their importance deserves.

Another reason for the same fact is that men under the influence of a worldly spirit, deceive themselves by mistaking the language of their lips and of their convictions for that of their hearts. Let a Christian, at almost any time, sit down to converse seriously, and he can be eloquent upon the vanity and emptiness of the world. And this, he fancies is a proof that he is not worldly-minded. But while he says these things with his lips, and while his understanding perhaps assents to their truth, his heart and his life speak a very different language. His eager pursuit of worldly objects, his joy when they are obtained, and his sorrow when they are lost, prove that whatever he may say, he does not regard them as trifles.

But the grand reason which renders worldly-mindedness more deceitful than any other sin, is the facility with which it assumes the name and appearance of a virtue. It is the duty of a Christian, for instance, to provide for his family. And how easy is it to persuade himself that all his eager pursuit of

wealth, is merely a discharge of this duty.—Again, worldly-mindedness easily assumes the name and garb of economy, frugality, and industry; or even of charity, when a man flatters himself that he desires wealth in order to do good with it. Martha probably deceived herself in some such way. She probably thought that as the head of the family, it was her duty to do what she did, and that it was all done for Christ. But he knew her better than she knew herself.

There are three marks by which we may discover in ourselves the existence of a worldly spirit. The first is a careful, troubled, and anxious mind. Second, when worldly concerns lead to a neglect of the interests of the soul. Third, when there is little relish for devotional exercises. Either of these marks proves infallibly the existence of a worldly spirit.

These are the heads of a sermon I preached lately. I make no particular application to your case, leaving you to do this for yourself If you find that you are under the power o this sin, remember that the spirit of the world and the spirit of God are irreconcileable, and

that no man can serve two masters. Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

REPLY TO LETTER XX.

MY DEAR FATHER,

I LIKE very much your plan of giving me an account of your sermons, and wish you would do so as often as you have time. I wish very often that I could hear you preach every Sabbath as I used to do, and I hardly ever go to church without thinking about you, and wondering what you are preaching about. I never thought before of worldly-mindedness as a peculiarly deceitful sin, nor had I ever noticed how strange it was that Martha should appeal so confidently to Christ as she did. It makes me fear that I may be indulging many sins of which I am wholly unconscious.

I have been as usual, a good deal discouraged at times, since I wrote last. It seems

to make no difference whether I strive and pray against a sin, or whether I let it alone—there it remains just the same. And when I try to pray, there is often such a sense of hopelessness about it, that I perform it merely as a task, without expecting any good from it. Whatever arguments I use to conquer this unbelief, the same reply is constantly suggested —that I have prayed and prayed so many times, and it has been all in vain, and it will probably be the same now. I cannot help thinking of the text, "He hath covered himself with a cloud that our prayers should not pass through." How I envy the disciples who lived with Christ on earth! I was reading this morning that prayer of Job, "Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! I would bring my cause before him, I would fill my mouth with arguments!" It seemed to express exactly my feelings, and then it was that I thought of the disciples, and how great was their privilege in being always with Christ, and never being obliged to mourn his absence. It seems to me that if he were on earth now, I would go to him, and never leave his feet till I had

obtained an answer of peace. But oh! how dark and hopeless every thing looks! how the way seems to be hedged up! He hath covered himself with a cloud, that my prayer should not pass through.

LETTER XXVI.

MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

I HAVE no objection to complying with your request, that I would occasionally give you an account of the sermons of the preceding Sabbath. But I judge from your letter that the sermon you need is one which I preached some time since, on the text, "How long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?" This seems to be a question you are now disposed to ask with respect to your own prayers; and you may perhaps discover the answer by reading this letter. The sermon contained both reproof and encouragement; and you can appropriate whichever you need, or both, if you require them.

1. God's delaying, and even his delaying for a long time to answer our prayers, is no certain proof that he is displeased either with them or with us. He often does this in order to try their faith and patience, and to make

the blessing more welcome when it is received. Proofs of this truth we find in the history of Daniel, and of the Syrophenician woman. And he has accordingly given us directions what to do in such a case; wait on the Lord, wait patiently for him; pray and not faint; though it tarry, wait for it. Nor, 2, is it a certain proof that God is displeased with us or our prayers, when our situation, instead of becoming more favourable, seems to grow more and more hopeless. The situation of the children of Israel in Egypt, became worse than ever when they cried unto the Lord; yet even then he had begun to take measures for their deliverance. So the Syrophenician woman appeared to be put farther and farther from hope, by each successive answer of our Lord. 3. The only way, therefore, in which individuals can ascertain whether God is or is not displeased with them and with their prayers, is by attending to their own feelings, temper and conduct, under the delay of an answer. If delays serve to humble them, to make them more diligent in seeking to discover and subdue their secret sins; if their faith and patience remain unshaken, and they

are enabled to continue waiting, watching and praying;—and especially if their prayers become more frequent, fervent and importunate, it is a certain sign that God is not displeased with them, and that he means to answer them in due time. Indeed, he is already granting them one of the best answers, by giving them grace to perform these duties, and persevere in seeking the desired blessing.

On the contrary, if, when answers to prayer are delayed, men become less diligent and zealous in subduing themselves, and seeking for deliverance; if their prayers degenerate into a mere formal service, and they ask without any strong desire or expectation of receiving an answer; and especially, if they become impatient, and murmur against God, saying in their hearts that it is a vain thing to wait upon him,—then it is certain that he is angry with them and their prayers; for he is showing his anger by withdrawing from them more and more the gracious influences of his Spirit, and thus leaving them to incur more severe afflictions. Now this is usually, though perhaps not always, the case with those who feel disposed to ask the question, How long, Lord,

wilt thou be angry, &c. It is true it *may* be asked with right feelings; it may be the language of humble, believing, thirsting importunity. But generally speaking, it is the proud, the self-righteous, the impatient, who wonder why God does not answer them. They do not suspect the fault to be in themselves. Their prayers appear so excellent and meritorious in their own eyes, that it seems strange to them how God can delay to answer them. Sometimes too this question is raised by unbelief, and they begin to faint and despond at the least delay. To both these classes of persons we may consider God as giving the following answer.

1. I will be angry against you and your prayers, till you are more sincere; till your temper and conduct correspond better with your prayers. Have you not been told that if you regard iniquity in your heart, I will not hear you; I do not see that you watch, or deny yourselves, or take up the cross, or exhort each other, or warn sinners of their danger, or perform any of the duties I have enjoined. If you would have your prayers answered, repent of your backslidings; renounce

your idols; return to your first love; do your first works. Then call on the Lord and He will answer you.

2. I will be angry against you and your prayers until you are more humble, until you are more sensible of your own sinfulness, of the greatness of the blessings you ask, and of your utter unworthiness to receive them. Have you not heard that it is to the humble my blessings are promised? Are not my sacrifices those of a broken spirit, and a contrite heart? Go, then, and learn to be humble. Go and wait in the posture of a suppliant, while I consider what I shall do unto thee.

4. I will be angry against your prayers until you show by increased fervency, frequency and importunity in prayer, that you really desire the blessings you ask, and have some just conceptions of their worth. I cannot learn from your prayers whether you are in earnest or not; seek with your whole heart, cry after knowledge, and lift up your voice for understanding; then shall you understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

5. Until you pay more regard to my word, to its precepts, its warnings, its threatenings

and its promises. When you begin to hear me, I will begin to hear you. And the more regard you pay to my word, the more will I pay to yours.

Now, my dear Maria, examine into the character of your prayers. See whether they are prompted by a sincere regard to God's glory, and accompanied by watchfulness and sobriety, by humility and self-denial; see whether they become more fervent and importunate the longer the blessing is delayed; whether they lead you to prize more highly the blessings you seek, and to feel more deeply your own unworthiness of them. If so, then be encouraged, for God will hear you. If not, then cease to wonder and complain that your prayers are not heard, and endeavour to offer such as shall be acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Do not, however, let the sense of your deficiences keep you from the throne of grace. The worst prayer, if it has the least sincerity in it, is better than no prayer at all. And the way to pray aright is to *keep praying*, humbly looking for aid to the Spirit who helpeth our infirmities. Besides, if you go humbly you cannot go

wrong—the broken and contrite heart God will not despise. There is more to be said about prayer, which I may write at another time.

REPLY TO LETTER XXIX.

MY DEAR FATHER,

I AM filled with shame and confusion, to see how blind I have been; blind to the true character of my prayers; and what presumption, pride, and self-righteousness I have been guilty of, in wondering why God did not answer my prayers. The wonder is, that he ever has answered any of them, or done anything for me; that he has even suffered me to pray at all. Oh, how much pride and self-will I discover in myself—what a want of humility and sincerity in my best services! If I had never committed any sins but the sins of my prayers, they would be enough to sink me to hell. I hardly know which particular mentioned in your sermon condemns me most; each one seemed a sentence against me. And yet I have been complaining of God because

he did not answer me! Oh, let me get down into the dust—I am ashamed before God, and ashamed before you, dear father, that I have exhibited such a proud and impatient spirit. I found it easy enough to extract *reproof* from your sermon, but not so easy to get *encouragement.* I feel as if I *must* cease to pray, and not insult God any more by such wretched services. However, I strove against this feeling, and endeavoured to encourage myself in the concluding part of your letter, and in the thought that *any* prayer, if sincere, was better than no prayer.

LETTER XXX.

MY DEAR MARIA,

I AM glad that you appear to be sensible of the great sin of impatience and repining, when God delays to answer prayer. But there is more to be done than to refrain from murmuring. We ought to take care to acknowledge thankfully those answers to prayer we have already received, and the mercies daily showered on us. There is apt to be a great deficiency in Christians in this particular. They do not properly consider and appreciate the blessings which God does bestow on them, and this is one reason why they do not obtain more. David was not guilty of this sin. His petitions for new favours are almost invariably accompanied by thanksgivings for past ones. "Thou hast delivered my soul from death, wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling?" There is no Christian who cannot properly adopt this language. Review your own

past life, and see how it is. You have been complaining that God does not answer your prayers; but is this *true?* How is it, then, that you have been kept from utter apostasy? How is it that you still have a throne of grace to go to, and requests to present there? Have you not many times said, "It is all in vain; I must give up; my enemies are too strong for me?" Yet when you said, My foot slippeth, God's mercy held you up. When you said, I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul, He appeared and put your enemies to flight. When your feet sunk in the horrible pit and the miry clay, and there seemed to be no deliverer near, even then he came, and set your feet on a rock, and established your goings. Acknowledge, then, these mercies; "praise him for all that is past;" get your heart warmed with a view of God's loving-kindness, then you will find it easy to "trust him for all that's to come."

There is another point in one of your late letters, of which I must take notice. You speak of *envying* the disciples, who had Christ always with them. Now this feeling is founded on a mistake; and a mistake, if I am not deceived, which is very common among Chris-

tians. It is evident, that if Christ were on earth, and you carried to him your body merely; that is, if you went without penitence, or faith, or love, or humility, you would receive no benefit from going. On the contrary, if you go *with* these feelings, *i. e.*, if you go in *spirit*, you can go as easily now as if he were on earth, and are as sure to receive an answer. Not only did the actual disciples of our Lord enjoy no advantage over us, but we enjoy a great advantage over them. This is plain from his express declaration, "It is expedient for you that I go away." And a little reflection will show us *why* it is so; in other words, why the presence of the Holy Spirit, which we enjoy, is more advantageous to us than the bodily presence of Christ would have been. In the first place, this is evident from the different offices which they sustain in the work of redemption. It was the office and work of Christ to make atonement for sin, and to work out eternal redemption for us. But it is the peculiar office of the Holy Spirit to apply that redemption to our souls. He begins and carries on the work of grace in the heart, and it is by him alone that Christians

have access, through Christ, unto the Father, and are sealed unto the day of redemption. The three great offices which Christ sustains to his people, are those of Prophet, Priest, and King. But in neither of these offices could Christ be of any advantage to us without the assistance of the divine Spirit. As a Prophet, he could teach us no more than any other prophet. It is true, he could reveal the will of God more perfectly than any other prophet; but, without the Spirit, he could not make us either understand or believe it. Accordingly, the personal preaching of Christ was much less successful than that of his apostles. Three times as many, probably, were converted under Peter's first sermon, as by all the sermons of Christ. Christ could give his disciples a form of prayer; but the Spirit alone could write this prayer in their hearts, and enable them to offer it sincerely. Christ could reveal to them his law; but the Spirit alone could make it an inward, life-giving principle. The apostles made greater advances in grace and knowledge, in one hour, under the Spirit's teaching, than during the whole three years of Christ's ministry.

Christ could not benefit us as a Priest and Intercessor, without the Spirit. It is true that his blood cleanseth from all sin; but it must be applied to the conscience by the Holy Spirit. It is true that Christ can, as our Intercessor, offer up any prayers that are presented; but without the Spirit we should have none to present. Neither could Christ benefit us as a King. No king can be of any service, but to those who submit to him. But it is the work of the Spirit to subdue our stubborn wills, and make them bow to the sceptre of Christ. There is nothing derogatory to Christ in this view, for he never came to do these things. His work was to make atonement for sin, and thus procure the Spirit for us. When he ascended on high he gave gifts unto men, even the gift of the Spirit.

Another reason why the presence of the Spirit is more useful to us than the personal presence of Christ would be, is, that he can be in all places at once. If Christ were now on earth, he would wear a human body, and could, therefore, necessarily be but in one place at a time. Comparatively few could, therefore, be in his immediate presence, or en-

joy his society and example. The Spirit, on the contrary, is not confined to one place. He can dwell in the hearts of all Christians at once. He can revive the graces, indite the petitions, and comfort the hearts of thousands in the most distant parts of the world. And, lastly; if Christ were on earth, he could and would say nothing more to us than is already contained in his word, and therefore no more than he already says to us now. We have recorded in the Bible what he actually *did* say to his disciples while he was on earth. If he were with us, he would address to us the same precepts, the same promises, the same reproofs, the same exhortations. And he would address them to our outward ear merely. It is not his office to apply truth to the heart. We should, therefore, gain nothing by having his personal presence. The Holy Spirit, on the contrary, speaks to our hearts. He takes these truths which we have, perhaps, read a hundred times without understanding or feeling them, and applies them to our consciences; opens them to our understandings, and writes them upon our hearts. He unseals the Bible, which, without him, remains a

sealed book forever. He makes its precepts effectual to our quickening, reproof, and growth in righteousness. He makes us know that the promises are ours, and renders them effectual to our comfort and consolation. He teaches us what to pray for, and himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. In short, there is no possible want or need of the Christian, connected with his progress in holiness, and his ultimate perfection in it, which this blessed agent does not supply. Instead, then, of wishing to change places with the first disciples, how thankful ought we to be for our superior privileges! How grateful that we live in these last days, upon whom the ends of the earth are come! And how ought we to adore the wisdom and love conspicuous in the plan of redemption, in which all the persons of the Trinity so gloriously conspire!

REPLY TO LETTER XXX.

MY DEAR FATHER,

For a few days past I have been permitted to taste something of the *happiness* of loving and serving Christ. How unspeakable is his compassion! How boundless his love! That he could pity and save even me! Oh how sure, how firm, how everlasting are his promises! He is indeed a Rock, and I lean on him, and trust my all to him with unlimited confidence. It does not seem as if I could ever despond again, and I feel that he has yet greater things in store for me, if I am ready to receive them. But I fear—no, I will not fear; I will keep my eye fixed on him, and look away from myself. Your last letter, dear father, was greatly blessed to me. It gave me clearer views of the offices of the Holy Spirit, and a deeper sense of his existence and presence. It seems to me that I have not thought half enough of him, and of his share in the work of redemption. In fact I know nothing in religion, and see plainer and plainer how much there is to be known; how much

in the Bible to be studied; how much hidden meaning that I have never seen; and yet how often it is dull and tedious to me. O, I need an ocean of grace at once. Pray for me, dear father.

LETTER XXXI.

MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

I AM glad that you are favoured with a larger measure than common of spiritual influences. These should be seasons of progress, emphatically, and we should take advantage of the additional light afforded us, to gain clearer views of divine truth. There is one way, especially, in which such seasons should be improved; and that is by *importunate* prayer. When we have access to the throne of grace, then is the time to present large petitions—for ourselves, for the church, for sinners. There are many and striking passages in the Bible, as you well know, which encourage importunity in prayer. Still, we often lose the benefit of them through unbelief. It may be profitable, therefore, to consider some of the reasons why it is proper and consistent for God to grant blessings in answer to importunate prayer, which he

would not otherwise grant. These reasons are involved in the character of the prayer itself. Importunate prayer involves the exercise of *strong faith.* A man will never plead importunately for any blessing, unless he believes that there is a God who hears prayer, and who is able and willing to bestow that blessing. And this he must continue to believe, without wavering; otherwise his importunity will cease. Now, such a faith glorifies God in a high degree. "Strong in faith," says the Apostle, "giving glory to God." All the promises, accordingly, are made to faith. Nothing is promised to unbelief. Here, then, is one reason why God may and will bestow blessings in answer to importunate prayer, which he would not bestow on any other condition.

Again, importunate prayer involves a *high esteem* of the blessings sought, and a corresponding *desire* to obtain them. We may always ascertain the value which men put upon any object, by the earnestness and perseverance with which they pursue it. Now, would it not be proper, and wise, and consistent with God's character, to bestow blessings

on a man who highly values them, which he denies to one who regards them with comparative indifference? Is not he who most highly values spiritual blessings, most likely to use and improve them in a proper manner?

Once more, importunate prayer involves the exercise of humility and patience. Pride takes offence at delays. Its language is, "Here I have been praying and praying so many years, yet no answer comes, no notice is taken. Why should I wait on the Lord any longer?" But humility and patience teach the petitioner to wait, and to wait long for an answer. They teach him to say, "It is not wonderful that so weak, and sinful, and ignorant a creature as I am, should be required to wait God's pleasure. How often have I made him wait for me." Evidently, it is proper and agreeable to God's promises that such a temper should receive blessings denied to the proud and impatient.

These remarks will help you to determine, not only what is the character of your prayers, but what is your religious state in all respects. Earnest, persevering prayer involves the religious exercise of all the Christian graces.

Languid, formal prayers show that we have little religion or none at all. Here too, we see what is the key to unlock all the treasures of heaven. It is *importunate prayer.* Let us never pretend that we really desire to obtain these treasures, unless we are using this key. Nor let us ever wonder that we do not receive them, so long as we neglect to use it. By putting this key into our hands, God does, in effect, say to us, as he did to Solomon, Ask what thou wilt and it shall be given thee. My daughter, what is *your* petition, and what is your request?

REPLY TO LETTER XXXII.

MY DEAR FATHER,

I BEGIN to write with such mingled feelings, that I hardly know which is uppermost, or which to express first. Gratitude to God and to you, and shame for myself, seem to struggle together in my heart. Oh, how good God has been to me in a thousand ways! and

especially in giving me such a father. When I read your letters, dear father, the reasons for living a devoted and holy life seem so strong, and the encouragement to it so great, that I think each time I receive one, Now, surely, I shall go on; and shall make progress after this. The way is plain, and the motives are so urgent. And yet, for some reason or other, I do not seem to get on much faster than before. It is always *going to be* better with me, but it never is. It is always to-morrow and to-morrow—there is something in the way which I cannot see; something that seems to hold me back from receiving the promise *now*. And even when I am reading or listening to the most encouraging promises of the Bible, I have a secret distrust and despondency; I do not believe that they will be realized in *my* case. I ask myself again and again, what is in the way, but cannot find out; and yet I am always, or almost always, desponding. Is it not, dear father, the fault of my natural constitution? You know I am always prone to look on the dark side of every thing; or at least, I hope for too much, and the reaction from disappointed hope throws

me into despondency. It seems to me, sometimes, that I should be willing to lay my heart entirely open to you, if you could thereby discover to me the hidden obstacle in my way.

LETTER XXXII.

MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

I HAVE no doubt that your natural temperament has *something* to do with your religious difficulties. But, then, I am equally certain that this is not their main source, and that, in spite of your constitution, you might, by God's grace, become a devoted and cheerful Christian. This is what you are to aim at, and never to seek to excuse yourself for not attaining to it, by pleading natural infirmity.

It is often the case that despondency grows out of, or is used as a cover to indolence and self-indulgence. We find it so in the common affairs of life. A man who is too indolent, or too fond of his ease, to be willing to take the necessary pains to succeed in a certain undertaking, professes that he is apprehensive of failure, and thinks it would be rash and presumptuous to make the attempt. Another, less afraid of toil and hardship, goes forward,

undertakes the work, and succeeds. The saying that "*where there's a will there's a way*," is true in spiritual matters. When a man is *determined* to live a holy life, at all events, cost what it may, he will not be daunted by a few difficulties; he will cut his way through the armed men, as did the man whom Christian saw at the Interpreter's house, and take the kingdom of heaven by storm. Meanwhile the sluggard sighs, Oh, that it were mine! but he desireth, and hath nothing.

The same truth was more than once illustrated in the history of the Jews. When Moses sent men to search the land of Canaan, they brought back an evil report of it, saying, "We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak; and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so were we in their sight." Here was evidently unbelief and slothfulness; and, as a punishment, the men who had brought up this report, died there before the Lord. At a later period, God sent the prophet Haggai to the Jews, saying, "Is it a time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and the house

of the Lord lieth waste? Yet ye say, the time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." Here sloth and self-indulgence were the difficulty. The Jews were living in ease and luxury, while God's house lay in ruins, and excusing themselves for so doing by pleading, The time is not come; there are too many obstacles in the way—God's time is not ready. So a church at the present day excuses itself for not diligently and earnestly seeking a revival of religion, by saying, The Lord's time has not come. There are many hinderances and stumbling-blocks to be removed before the Holy Spirit can visit us. And thus, too, an individual Christian, ashamed to acknowledge that he is too slothful or too self-indulgent to seek earnestly the graces of the Holy Spirit, satisfies his conscience by saying that he is discouraged; he has made so many efforts and offered so many prayers to no purpose; he is dependant upon God, and he must wait God's time. The truth is, he is not willing to make the necessary effort; to examine himself, to strive against sin, to pray and humble himself, and take up the cross. And that he is not willing to do

this, is evident from his not doing it. He knows perfectly well, that if he did these things and persevered in them, he should obtain a blessing. He knows that God's word is sure, that he remains faithful; and he feels assured that if he will return unto God, God will return unto him. The fault is in his own will; and his professed despondency is, whether he is sensible of it or not, only a cover to indolence. Oh, how many false excuses and disguises are put to flight at once, by a resolved will—a simple, hearty desire and willingness to do one's duty. And, until we have this, we may expect that our way will be hedged up, that our prayers will be shut out, and that we shall walk in darkness, and see no light.

And now, my dear daughter, are you sure that this is not the difficulty with you? Is not this spirit of indolence and self-indulgence, this want of a right will, the "secret something," which makes you break all your resolutions, and prevents your attaining a stable and settled peace. If you say, "It is not, I *am* willing to make efforts, and watch and deny myself, and take up my cross,"—then prove that

you are so *by doing it.* Begin at once, *now*, to do every one of these things, to obey every precept of the Saviour, and see if he will not say to you, as to the Jews of old, "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, and see if I will not pour you out a blessing so great, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

REPLY TO LETTER XXXII.

MY DEAR FATHER,

YOUR letter has let a light into my heart. I believe you have said something like this to me before, but I never felt its force as I do now. It appears perfectly evident to me that this is the difficulty with me; and that most, if not all, of my despondency, grows out of an indolent and self-indulgent temper—an unwillingness to make the necessary sacrifices and efforts for obtaining holiness. After reading your letter I began to examine myself. I inquired, what is the reason that I do not now, this moment, begin to seek, with my whole heart and soul, for spiritual blessings? Is it because I do not believe that if I should thus

seek I should find? And I saw plainly that this was *not* the reason. I knew very well that if I performed my part of the covenant, God would perform his. If I sought him with *all my heart*, I should find him. But there was a something that hung back. I had then the whole evening before me, and might have spent it in prayer. But I could only offer a few rather languid petitions; I tried to shake off the lethargy that seemed to hang over me, but could not; the idea of living a life of constant warfare and self-denial was disheartening; and I saw clearly that this was my state of feeling. Here, then, I seemed to have reached the true root of my difficulties; it was indolence, after all, that lay at the bottom. At first I thought I had gained a great deal on making this discovery; but presently I found that it was no great gain; for *seeing* the difficulty did not at all remove it. There was the disinclination as strong as ever, and my seeing it did me no good, if I could not get rid of it. And this I could not do; I felt that I must be made over, before toil, and effort, and prayer, and watchfulness, could become pleasant to me, or be voluntarily un-

dergone. So back I fell into the Slough of Despond again, deeper than ever. Nor do I see that it makes much difference whether indolence, or unbelief, or pride, or selfishness, is my greatest enemy, so long as I have no power to subdue either of them. Besides, there are times when this particular sin of indolence does *not* seem to be *the* obstacle—times when I feel as if I should rejoice to spend and be spent for Christ; when I feel willing to undergo hardship, self-denial, labour to any extent, if I may but become like him, and glorify him in the world. In the strength of these feelings I make some efforts, but they gradually die out, and I relapse into my ordinary state.

Oh, what a blessed life must the Christian's be, who has not so many sins to contend with! What happiness to love and serve God cheerfully and voluntarily, with all the powers of the soul, without such a body of sin and death to drag one down to the ground! Dear father, it must be delightful to you;—you find it so easy to do right and serve God all the time, and how hard you must find it to understand such a state as mine. A state of bondage indeed!

LETTER XXXIII.

MY DEAR CHILD,

I SYMPATHISE with you in the trials and discouragements you groan under, and which are not the less deserving of sympathy because they are, as you feel, the results of your own sinfulness. But you are quite mistaken in supposing that I do not know by experience every one of these trials. I have passed through every conflict and experienced every difficulty under which you struggle; and have seen far more evil in my heart than you have yet seen in yours. And I can assure you that there is *no* Christian who "finds it *easy* to do right and serve God all the time." Whenever a Christian pursues a devoted and exemplary course, you may be sure that he does it (under God) by dint of unwearied effort, prayer and watchfulness. For one has no more strength or goodness in himself than another; and each has these same evils to con-

tend with and overcome, under which you groan; indolence, pride, unbelief, worldliness, and selfishness. All these must be overcome by every man who would reach heaven; and therefore there is no *easy* road to heaven. Whatever obstacles and discouragements you meet with, be assured that they are no greater than thousands of others have encountered, and by the grace of God, overcome. Still I acknowledge they are very great. We cannot gain the victory over the smallest of them in our own strength. And though the experienced Christian, in looking back upon his life, can see that there were aids offered him, promises made to him, and succour at hand,—though he can see that in this or that hour of temptation, God was near him, and his Saviour was praying for him that his faith might not fail—yet while he is passing through the furnace, he does not see this. He often seems to himself to be left under the power of his corruptions, and a prey to Satan's wiles, with no eye to pity, and no arm to save. But if he continue to pray and struggle, this alone is evidence enough that he is not thus abandoned. A fire will not continue to burn

without fuel. A vessel will not move against wind and tide, without some propelling force. Therefore, the Christian who continues to fight against sin, may take courage, in hope of final victory.

But these considerations, which are intended as a remedy against despair, should not have the effect of making you contented with your present attainments. They are to encourage you in effort—not in sloth. They are to induce you always to abound in the work of the Lord, *forasmuch* as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. You say that it is one thing to see an evil in your heart, and another thing to get rid of it. Very true, and you will have occasion to feel the truth of it many times, if you live. But then it is best to know what are our enemies, because we know what to fight against and what to pray for. As to what particular sin is the root of *all* your difficulties, it is probably neither indolence, nor unbelief, nor any other, but *sin;* that is all of them together.

And now, as to the question what you are to do with this sin—what you are to do when you find indolence, for example, opposing

your progress. Here it is, holding you in its chains, and you feel powerless against it. You are to do *two things*, and to do them at once. Neither of them will be of any use without the other. One of them is to *strive* against that particular sin, to seek to mortify it and put it down, by performing those very duties from which it would hinder you. And the other thing is to feel that you have no strength in yourself, and to cry to God for help, in faith. Or to reverse the order, you are to throw yourself upon him for strength, and then in that strength go forward and do your duty. Or to put the two things together, as one thing—and in fact they are one—you are to "BE STRONG—*in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*" Or in still other words, you are to *work*, as if all depended upon you, and to *believe*, as if all depended upon God. Now, the latter point is probably the one in which you have been most deficient, and this is the reason why your strivings have not been more successful. They have been made in your own strength. We are perpetually endeavouring to separate what God has joined together. We either re-

fuse to strive at all, pleading our own helplessness and weakness as an excuse—or we strive, in a spirit of self-dependence, refusing to trust in God for strength. Either error is fatal to our progress. If you ever overcome one sin, if you ever perform one duty, if you ever get to heaven, it will not be by your working without God, nor by God's working without you; but by God's working *in* you, and consequently your working out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Now, an unbeliever might say, "It is impossible to unite two things so incompatible. It is absurd to tell me that I have no strength, that I am utterly helpless, and yet require me to work." But the Christian knows that here is no absurdity, and no incompatibility. He knows that the more deeply he is sensible of his entire dependance on God—in the right way—the harder he works, and the faster he gets on. Read the epistles of Paul, and see how well he understood the connection and union of these two truths. And this was the secret of his zeal, of his fidelity, and of his success. It was because he could say, "I can do all things—through Christ which strength-

eneth me;" "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me;" that he was able also to say, "I have fought a good fight; I have kept the faith; I have finished my course; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of life, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day." The same means which Paul used are in your hands. They will lead to the same result. Only learn to *trust wholly in Christ, to be strong in his strength;*—and there are no bounds to your progress. There is no reason why you may not be as devoted as Paul, and why you may not die with his triumphant exclamation, I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course!

REPLY TO LETTER XXXIII.

MY DEAR FATHER,

IT seems to me that I have enjoyed more happiness in religion within a few weeks than in all my life before. This has been owing mostly, if not wholly, to new views of Christ,

and my relation to him. I seem to be just beginning to understand what you have been labouring so long to teach me—that Christ is my *all.* I always *knew* that I was to trust in him alone for *justification;* but I have had a secret feeling that for the rest, I must help myself. I did not see or comprehend fully that he was to be my *sanctification* also. Or at any rate, I see it now more clearly;—the Holy Spirit, I hope, has been teaching it to me. And as I have wondered, in my despairing moods, how I could ever hope, with such a heart,—sorrow and wonder how I can ever despond with such a Saviour. This morning I had a most delightful view of him as my *Shepherd,* in reading the 10th chapter of John. I am astonished that I have read this precious chapter so often and never understood it. *My Shepherd!*—why, if I can only believe this always, what do I want more? What have I to do but confide in him, and give myself up to his guidance? How *certain* it is that he will always take care of me! How *sure* that he will never let any pluck me out of his hand! I feel such a sense of security as I cannot describe—as if I were held in the hol-

low of his hand—safe there—and had only to go about the work he gives me to do in his strength. Oh, that I may work for him! Oh, that I may not lose these feelings!

LETTER XXXIV.

MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

WHILE I rejoice and bless God that he has made to you some new discoveries of himself so that your lips utter the language of praise, instead of the complaints of despondency, I feel anxious that you should make a right use of these consolations. All God's dealings with his people are intended for their *good*, and to promote their sanctification. This is as true of his dealings in withdrawing from them, and leaving them to darkness and desertion, as it is of his dealings in drawing near to them, and allowing them the comforts of his Spirit. If perpetual joy and peace would be best for them they would always have it. But they need to be left to themselves to teach them their own helplessness and nothingness; and they need to be encouraged now and then with cordials, to show them what a fulness there is in Christ, and what rewards are laid up for

them. When they are left in darkness, they should not murmur and despond, but learn to exercise faith and patience; and when they are favoured with consolations, they should not be puffed up, but take courage and go on stedfastly in duty. The difficulty with young Christians is, that they do not rightly understand the design of these dispensations, and conclude that their present state, whatever it is, will continue always. If they feel the burden of their corruptions, find the light of God's countenance withdrawn, and have no comfort in religious duties, they are presently overcome with discouragement, are ready to give up all hope, and are brought entirely to a stand. They think that God will never more appear for them, and that perhaps all their past experience was a delusion. Whereas, they should consider that comfort is not indispensable to the performance of duty; that their business is to go on serving God and doing good to their fellow-creatures, and to wait patiently till God sees fit to remove the trial from them. They should consider that they have now an opportunity to show their attachment to him in a way which they never

could have, if they were always favoured with smiles and sunshine. They should remember that faith and patience would never be called into exercise without trials, and that now is the time to honour God in the eyes of the world, by exhibiting these graces. They should "trust in the name of the Lord, and stay themselves upon their God," believing that he will in his own good time appear for their deliverance.

On the contrary, when young Christians are favoured with clear apprehensions of divine truth, suitable affections in view of it, and a lively and comforting sense of their near relation to Christ, they are too apt to look at these things as present comforts, rather than as incentives and encouragements to labour and sacrifice. If these comforts are long-continued, they become self-confident and presumptuous; they imagine that their enemies are subdued under them, and that henceforth it will be easy to go on in the way of holiness. They grow remiss in prayer and watchfulness, become puffed up with spiritual pride, and are obliged to be awakened from their delusion by another painful lesson in self-knowledge.

That this may not be the case with you, my dear child, "watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation." Do not be afraid to trust too much, or rejoice too much in Christ, but beware that *self*-trust does not imperceptibly steal into your heart. Pray every day against the pride of your heart, and against the wiles of the tempter, and thus "rejoice with trembling." The good Shepherd is ever near, to him commit yourself, and keep close to his side.

REPLY TO LETTER XXXIV.

MY DEAR FATHER,

THE effect which you dreaded for me, of the peace and comfort I was experiencing when I last wrote to you, really followed; that is, to some extent. After I had continued for some days in a very delightful and happy frame of mind, I began to feel quite satisfied and at ease. All religious duties were so easy and pleasant, that I could not help thinking it would be always so, and that I should never again find prayer wearisome,

and the Bible a tedious book. I detected this feeling very soon, having been put on my guard by your letter, and endeavoured to banish it. I repeated to myself continually that it was only a suggestion of spiritual pride, and that if I listened to it, I should pay dearly for it; for God would leave me to myself. But all these reasonings were of no use; I ran with my eyes open into the net, and the consequences I expected soon followed. I was left alone, and for a time had no more power to feel than a block. However, God was gracious to me, and kept me from sinking so deep in the mire as I have sometimes done; he enabled me to repent of my sin, and return to him.

But, dear father, how can it be that we can *be proud*, and yet see that we have nothing to be proud of, and that if God forsakes us, we shall be helpless again: how can it be that the decisions of the understanding have so little influence over our feelings and conduct. According to this, I may be always learning, and yet never have learned; I may know a a thing, and yet not know it at the same time. Was there ever such stupidity and folly?

How can Christ help being weary of me? How can he bear with me so long? What shall I do with this wretched heart of mine? How *can* I keep from sinning and grieving my dear Saviour? It seems better to die, than to do this, and yet I shall, I know I shall. If the convictions of my understanding are so powerless, if I can run into the fire with my eyes open, what security have I that I shall not do the same thing a thousand times more?

LETTER XXXV.

MY DEAR MARIA,

You have no security, my dear child, that you shall be kept from sin, any more than for any other blessing, except in the grace and promise of God. That you have, and is not that enough? You have his eternal word of promise that having begun a good work in you, he will carry it on to perfection. He has determined the result and appointed the means, and therefore it *shall* be done. And the means are these very experiences through which you are passing. For, however slow to learn we are, and though it may seem to us that we learn nothing, yet this is not altogether the case. It is impossible to go through such repeated experiences of the folly and treachery of our hearts, under the teachings of the Holy Spirit, without learning something. If the thousandth lesson do not suffice, perhaps the ten thousandth will. And if we are so besot-

ted and perverse as "to run with our eyes open into the fire," and to act and feel in opposition to the plain decisions of reason and conscience, why we learn at least from it how besotted and perverse we are. We learn more and more to admire and adore the infinite love and forbearance of our Saviour and Friend, who does not become weary of us, even when we become weary of ourselves. If we treat earthly friends with coldness and indifference, if we call in question their love, disbelieve their promises, neglect their advice, and repay their favours with ingratitude, their patience will be exhausted, and they will leave us to ourselves. But none of these things, nor all of them together, can provoke Christ to forsake his people. If this were not the case, we must inevitably perish; for our conduct towards him is little else than a continued series of provocations. We call in question his love, we disbelieve his promises, break his laws, neglect his counsels, grieve his Spirit, and dishonour his name. If he favours us with temporal or spiritual blessings, we soon grow proud, careless, and secure, and idolize the gifts, while we forget the Giver. If in mercy

he corrects us, by removing our idols, our sullen hearts are prone to murmur and charge him with unkindness. If he overcomes our enemies, we ascribe the victory to ourselves. If he suffers us to be overcome, we unbelievingly accuse him of neglecting to fulfil his promises. If he lifts upon us the light of his countenance, we are soon puffed up with self-conceit; if he hides his face, we impatiently cry, the Lord has forgotten us. When we go astray, he graciously seeks us, and heals our backslidings; but we almost immediately wander again. When we are defiled and polluted, he washes away our pollutions, but we soon plunge again into the mire of sin. In a word, the patience of all the men on earth, and all the angels in heaven, would be exhausted by the pride, perverseness, folly, and ingratitude, of which we are guilty. But, blessed be God, the patience of our Redeemer cannot be exhausted, for it is infinite. He multiplies his mercies as we multiply our provocations; though we continually forsake him, he will not forsake us; and though we weary him with our sins, and cause him to serve with our iniquities; yet he still cries,

"I, even I, am he that blotteth out your transgressions for mine own sake: I will not remember your sins."

And surely *we* ought not to give up, if our Saviour does not. If his patience endures, ours may well hold out. We should beware of adding another provocation to those of which we have been already guilty, by yielding to despondency and unbelief. Press on, my child. "He that endureth *to the end* shall be saved."

REPLY TO LETTER XXXV.

MY DEAR FATHER,

YOUR letter, this time, did not give me the consolation I needed. My present grief does not arise from any doubts of Christ's love and forbearance, but rather grows out of what I see of these attributes. The more distinctly I perceive and feel that he is full of compassion, and ready to forgive all my sins, the more it cuts me to the heart that I make him such miserable returns. I feel as if I could not bear such unmerited, such wonderful love; as

if I must pray him to punish me, to heap judgments upon me, so that my ingratitude need not be so flagrant. It seems as if I now first understood the meaning of the word *broken*-hearted; for my heart is, as it were, broken into a thousand pieces, by a sense of my own ingratitude, and of Christ's love. I do so *long* to make him some returns—and yet I never can, for if I am enabled to do anything for him, it will be only his grace that enables me, and this will lay me under new obligations. But what I fear, is, that I shall lose this fear of displeasing him which I now have, and shall continue to grieve him by my coldness and slothfulness, as I always have done. If I could only, by some act now, take hold of the future, so as to make sure of it, so as to be secure from sinning any more—what would I not give. The hope of reaching heaven does not tend to console me—to go to heaven, without having done anything for Christ, does not seem desirable. And to look back on such a life as mine has hitherto been, would, it seems to me, be sufficient to destroy happiness, even if I were there.

LETTER XXXVI.

MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

It is true, my dear daughter, that there is no consolation under the species of grief you have described; grief for having sinned against *love.* Nor ought there to be any. We must endure this punishment of wrong-doing, by the very constitution of our nature. Yet though no consolation can come from any foreign source, to those who suffer the pangs of repentance, there is a certain kind of joy mixed with the grief itself. Far different is this filial sorrow from the *remorse* of the slave. There is a sacred pleasure in the very bitterness of this grief—a pleasure which she felt, who washed the Saviour's feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and which made her more worthy of envy, than the possession of the worldling's highest joy. Yes, one hour spent, broken-hearted at Christ's feet, is worth all that the

world can offer. There is nothing which will have a stronger tendency to keep us from sin in future, than the exercise of this sorrow. It is perfectly incompatible with the *indulgence* of any sin. The fear which you express of falling into sin, and thus wounding your Saviour afresh, is a necessary consequence of true repentance. "For behold," says the apostle, "behold this self-same thing that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves; yea, what indignation; yea, what fear; yea, what vehement desire; yea, what zeal; yea, what revenge." Shrink not, then, from the pangs of a broken heart. Rather pray for a larger and larger measure of that ingenuous and filial sorrow, which is a pledge of our adoption, and the best safe-guard against the inroads of sin.

But this very fear and dread of falling into sin may be carried too far—or rather, it may be without another element which ought ever to accompany and modify it. You are aware that penitence should be mixed with faith; and in fact there can be no true, evangelical repentance without faith. But have you suffi-

ciently reflected, that this faith is to respect, not justification only, but sanctification. You are to believe in Christ, not only for the *forgiveness* of sin, but for deliverance from the *power* of sin. You are to trust him for grace, as well as pardon.

Another alleviation under this sorrow of which you complain, may be found in the reflection, that all your ingratitude and perverseness will not defeat Christ's plans, nor prevent his reaping the reward of his labours and sufferings. "He *shall* see of the travail of his soul, and *be satisfied.*" Every one of those whom the Father has given him in the covenant of redemption, shall be rescued from sin, and death, and hell, and brought home to heaven. The countless myriads of the redeemed out of every tongue, and people, and nation, will be assembled there, around their Redeemer, and will cast their crowns at his feet, while forever and forever they will ascribe to him glory, and honour, and praise, and thanksgiving, and blessing. All their happiness he will view as the result of his toils and sufferings. This was "the joy set before him," for which he endured the cross,

despising the shame. Then, every instance of our ingratitude and perverseness will reflect fresh glory on him who washed us from all these sins in his own blood, and who will have presented us to his Father, all-glorious, "not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."

REPLY TO LETTER XXXVI.

MY DEAR FATHER,

I HAVE begun to find out by my own experience, the truth of what you said, about comforts being designed to prepare us for duties and conflicts. I have had such dreadful and distressing views of my own depravity lately, that it needed all I had previously seen of Christ's compassion, and all the comforting sense of his love and faithfulness, to sustain me under them. As it was, I came near being utterly overwhelmed, and sinking into a state of blacker despair than ever. It has not been merely a general sense of *sin*, but a view of particular corruptions, such as pride, and selfishness, and worldliness, and self-indulgence.

In each of these particulars, my deficiencies seem infinite, and I am utterly filled with self-loathing, as I compare myself with the example Christ has left me. Oh, how my very soul thirsts after humility! and not less do I desire sincerity. This was made to appear very desirable to me, in reading the life of President Edwards. I long to be rid of all disguises and all affectations; to be willing to be seen for just what I am; to have my heart, as it were, turned inside out, every hidden recess explored and laid bare to this pure and all-pervading *light* of God's holiness. Oh, how hateful does this self-seeking, this constant desire for the admiration of others, appear! But I see more and more plainly that, in order to overcome these sins, there must be an unceasing warfare, and that indolence will be my worst foe. There is such a constant temptation to sit down in ease, and let things take their course.

LETTER XXXVII.

MY DEAR MARIA,

THAT religion is a *warfare* is one of its first principles; such as even babes in Christ ought thoroughly to understand. There is not a single passage in the New Testament which represents it as any thing else. The Christian must not use the means which other men employ to subdue their indolence; he must not be excited to action by a desire to obtain wealth, or distinction, or applause; yet he must subdue it far more effectually than they. For he has a great work to perform, a race to run, which requires constant watchfulness and persevering diligence; watchfulness and diligence which must end but with his life. Unless, then, he can overcome his indolence, he will overcome no other enemy, he will make no progress, he will fall short of the prize. He will sleep when he ought to wake; he will be idle when he ought to labour; he will talk

when he ought to act; speculate about religion when he ought to be practising it; read what others have thought, when he ought to be thinking himself; and listen, perhaps without emotion, to the prayers of others, when his whole heart ought to be pouring itself out in supplication. In a word, he will spare those sins which it is most difficult to subdue, and neglect those duties which it is most painful to perform. He will obtain little or no religious enjoyment himself; for the way of the slothful man is as a hedge of thorns. He will be no ornament or assistance to the church; for where any thing is to be done, he will always see a lion in the way.

On the contrary, he who overcomes his indolence and love of ease, will overcome every other enemy. With this enemy, then, you must begin and maintain a constant warfare. When you draw the sword against it, you must throw away the scabbard, and say, "Farewell forever to idleness and sinful ease." Your language must be, "I am now a servant, a soldier, a follower of him, who said, My meat and my drink is to do the will of my Father. One thing, therefore, I will do; for-

getting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those that are before, I will press toward the mark, for the prize of my high calling." To this resolution you must steadily adhere, in spite of the daily temptations you will meet with, to leave some duty unperformed, or to perform it only in a slothful, imperfect manner.

If this seems difficult, and almost impossible, remember in whose strength you are to work, and what rewards will crown your victory. Surely it is not too much to do for Christ; too much to do by the aids of his Spirit; too much to do to gain heaven. Surely we may well endure these light burdens, which are but for a moment, in hope of that "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" which is set before us. Oh! what a moment is life! How unspeakably trifling are its concerns! How all-important, how infinite, is eternity! How glad shall we one day be to wash out with tears of blood, if that were possible, every instance of ingratitude and coldness to our blessed Redeemer! Oh, then, my daughter, work while the day lasts; live for Christ while

you may. Count it all joy to endure labours, distresses, and sufferings for him. Then when he shall appear, you shall receive a crown of life that fadeth not away.

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